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THE PRODIGAL SON BECOMES A SWINE-HERD.

(See page 92.)

THE  
✓  
P R O D I G A L S O N.

In Four Parts.

BEING A

PRACTICAL EXPOSITION OF LUKE XV. 11-32.

CAREFULLY REVISED AND ENLARGED

BY

*aniel*  
REV. D. F. BRENDLE, A. M.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.  
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PHILADELPHIA:  
LINDSAY & BLAKISTON.

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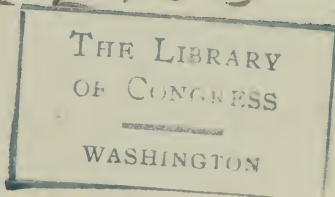
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MV G 6 MY 35

TO ALL  
THE YOUNG MEMBERS  
OF  
CHRIST'S KINGDOM,  
THIS  
LITTLE VOLUME  
IS  
Respectfully Dedicated  
BY  
THE AUTHOR.



## P R E F A C E .

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THIS work is a translation from the German, which the author published a year ago, and is now carefully revised and enlarged.

In offering a work of this kind to the public on an all-important and difficult subject, methinks I hear the gentle reader say:

“ 'T is pleasant, sure, to see one's name in print ;  
A book's a book, although there's nothing in 't.”

We have, however, no particular apology to make for offering it to the public, as it must either sink or swim upon its own merits.

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I would say, however, that my mind has been directed to this subject for some time, and knowing no practical work of the kind in extant, and believing at the same time that such a work would result in much good, we offer the "*Prodigal Son*" to the public, only regretting that the task has not been executed by a more able and skilful hand. Yet I would say to the reader, "Examine before you condemn."

In the preparation of this work we made use of the following works, viz.: Lange, Ewald, Olshausen, Ahlfeld, Couard, Keach, Lisco, Trench, and others; we therefore do not deem it necessary always to mention from which of these authors we received this or that thought.

We would say here to the reader that we

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offer no denominational work; but one, as we believe, which contains the truth as revealed in Christ Jesus, and adapted for all Christian denominations.

With these remarks we hope and pray that it may be accompanied by the blessing of God, and become a means, not only of restoring prodigal sons and daughters, but also a means to prevent such as are yet within the household of faith from exchanging it for the starvation and rags of the world.

D. F. B.

BETHLEHEM, Pa., July 4, 1862.





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## THE CREED. THE LORD'S PRAYER.

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In the name of God the Father, and of God the Son,  
and of God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker  
of heaven and earth :

And in Jesus Christ His only begotten Son our  
Lord ; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born  
of the Virgin Mary ; suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried ; He descended into  
hell ; the third day He rose from the dead ; He  
ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand  
of God the Father Almighty ; from thence He shall  
come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost ; the holy Catholic  
Church ; the communion of saints ; the remission  
of sins ; the resurrection of the body, and the life  
everlasting.

Lord, we believe ; help Thou our unbelief !

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.



LUKE 15 : 11-32.

AND he said, A certain man had two sons :

And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land ; and he began to be in want.

And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat : and no man gave unto him.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger !

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

And am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants.

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet :

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ; and let us eat, and be merry :

For this my son was dead, and is alive again : he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his elder son was in the field : and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

And he said unto him, Thy brother is come ; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

And he was angry, and would not go in : therefore came his father out, and entreated him.

And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment : and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends :

But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found.



## HYMN.

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“Tho’ parents may in cov’nant be,  
And have their heav’n in view;  
They are unhappy till they see  
Their children happy too.

“Their hearts with inward anguish bleed,  
When all attempts prove vain,  
And they pursue those paths that lead  
To everlasting pain.

“They warn, indulge, correct, beseech,  
While tears in torrents flow;  
And ’tis beyond the pow’r of speech,  
To tell the griefs they know.

“Till they can see victorious grace,  
Their children’s souls possess;  
The sparkling wit, the smiling face,  
But adds to their distress.

“ See the fond father clasp his child ;  
Hark ! how his bowels move —  
Shalt thou, my offspring, be exil'd  
From God, my Father's love ?

“ Shall cruel spirits drag thee down  
To darkness and despair,  
Beneath th' Almighty's angry frown,  
To dwell for ever there ?

“ Kind heav'n, the dreadful scene forbid ;  
Look down, dear Lord, and bless ;  
I'll wrestle hard as Abr'am did,  
May I obtain success !”



## THE PRODIGAL SON.



THE Holy Bible is our greatest and richest treasure; *it alone* reveals fully God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost; and it alone teaches us the manner of our creation, the fall, the redemption wrought by Christ; it shows us how to find this Redeemer, and how to obtain life everlasting. As God has not His equal, neither has the Bible. There are thousands of stars, but only one sun; thus, we have thousands of books, but only one Bible. As the heavens are higher than the earth, even so is the Bible superior to all other books. Consider how it would be without the sun; then you may understand how it would be without the Bible.

“ Within this awful volume lies,  
The mystery of mysteries ;  
Oh ! happiest they of human race,  
To whom our God has given grace,  
To hear, to read, to feel, to pray,  
To lift the latch, and force the way ;  
But better they had ne’er been born,  
Who read to doubt, or read to scorn.”

Reverence it, therefore ; examine it faithfully, and learn by blessed experience, to go the way of salvation, which Christ has revealed and marked out in this Book of Books, and particularly in this Parable. The Parable of the “ Prodigal Son ” is a kind of summing up in a short form the whole body of Divinity. This book will therefore be to the common reader, a short and simple exposition of some of the principal doctrinal points, upon which our salvation depends.

A Parable is the natural representation of divine truth, always in accordance with nature ; it moves in the spiritual world,

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but never transgresses the actual order of things natural.

Our Savior spoke many things in parables. The object in doing so, no doubt, was to impress divine truth more deeply upon the minds and hearts of men, especially of the scribes and Pharisees of his day.

When the disciples came to Jesus, and asked: "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" He answered and said unto them: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."\* Or as St. Luke says: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand;"† by which he would say: Unto you, who are my disciples, and enjoy my love and

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\* Matth. 13 : 10, 11.

† Luke 8 : 10.

friendship, it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God ; but unto them that are without,\* who will not believe in me, these things are spoken in parables : And because those who are without are satisfied with the parable, without endeavoring to penetrate into its meaning, or applying it to themselves, the word of truth can never be unto them a savor of life unto life.

In the course of our exposition of the Parable of "the Prodigal Son," we will often be required to make prominent the dark shadows of sin and of vice, and to exhibit the solemn denunciations of the Lord against them in His word ; but we beseech you, dear reader, not, on this account, to lay aside this book, but to read on and compare your life with what is presented in this parable, praying to the

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\* Mark 4 : 11.

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Lord, at the same time, that he may bless it to your spiritual and eternal profit.

Of all the parables spoken by our Lord, this one is the most captivating and affecting. It is almost impossible to read it without being deeply impressed with the sublimity of its character, and profoundly moved by its exhibition of love and mercy. It is certain, that sin cannot be painted in darker colors, or human misery be depicted in sadder features, than is done in this parable. And where can we find a more glorious evidence of the paternal love and mercy of God, than just in the mode of treatment of the father towards his prodigal son represented here?

This parable may be called the pearl and crown of all the parables of Scripture ; one too, which contains within itself such a circle of truths and doctrines, that we may justly call it a gospel within the gospel. For here is beautifully repre-

sented, in the history of an individual, sin and all its horrible consequences; the necessity of repentance and conversion, as well as the friendly reception and reconciliation on the side of God.

There have always been two different views in the Church in regard to the great primary application of this parable. There are those who have seen in the two sons the Jew and the Gentile, and in the younger son's departure from his father's house, the history of the great apostasy of the Gentile world; in the Prodigal's return they see the reception of the Gentile world into the privileges of the new covenant; in the conduct of the elder brother, however, who would not enter into the house of paternal joy, they see a lively type of the narrow-hearted, self-righteousness of the Jews, who grudged that the Gentiles should be admitted to the same blessings as themselves.

Others, again, beheld in the younger



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son a type of all those who, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether in that old dispensation which was then drawing to an end, or brought up in the bosom of the Christian Church, have widely departed from God by their sins; and after having tasted the misery of a sinful life, have by His grace been brought back to Him, as to the only source of comfort and life; while they have seen in the elder brother either a narrow form of real righteousness, or, accepting his own words, of Pharisaical righteousness,—one righteous in his own sight, but not in the Lord's.

The latter view seems to me to be the more correct, without, however, entirely excluding the former. For the children of Israel were the covenant people; Abraham's descendants were the family of God; they were under His discipline and guidance; they preserved His law; they maintained always a certain communion

with Him; they never entirely severed their connection with Him; they possessed His word, His revelation; they worshipped and served Him; they rejoiced in His protection and His special providence; wherefore also the father in this parable says to his elder son: "Son, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine."—The Gentiles, on the other hand, renounced their Creator, devoted themselves to all the abominations of idolatry, broke up all communion with Him, who, nevertheless, is their Lord and God, and "changed the glory of the incorruptible into an image made like to corruptible man," as St. Paul describes their apostasy. Rom. 1 : 21–26. — Nevertheless, this is not the leading thought of the parable. For it was spoken in reply to the murmuring of the scribes and Pharisees, who were offended that Jesus received, and even ate with publicans and



sinner: "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."\*

Before the first interpretation can have any claim to stand, it must first be shown that these publicans and sinners were heathens, which, indeed, the Church father Tertullian undertook to do, but, as we believe, without success. Besides, there is abundant scriptural evidence, that many of the publicans, probably of those in Judea, if not all, yet far the greater number, were of Jewish birth. Zachaeus was a son of Abraham;† and Levi, who sat at the receipt of custom, must needs have been so too: and publicans were among those who came to the baptism of John.‡ There may, indeed, have been some hea-

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\* Luke 15 : 1, 2.

† Luke 9 : 9.

‡ Luke 7 : 9.

then publicans within the limits of Judea; but doubtless these whom Jesus received were of Jewish origin, for with none but Jews did he familiarly live during his walk upon earth; for as He himself says, He was “not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”\*

These publicans and sinners were Jews—outcasts, indeed, of the nation, scorned and despised, and no doubt justly, until the words of Christ had awakened in them a nobler life. Thus far Christ had only given a few hints, that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, were called to Christianity, and there only to his chosen disciples, and which, for a long time after, were stumbling-blocks even to them.

Consequently, we believe that we can affirm, that our Savior would represent, in the younger son, all those who have separated themselves by a sinful life from

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\* Matth. 15 : 24.

the Jewish Church, and thereby also from God.

And as this was the case with the Jews, who abandoned the Jewish Church, it is nevertheless not confined alone to them, but also is applicable in our time to all those who abandon the Christian Church, and live in the misery of sin and corruption. Far as the sinner may have departed from God, he is still encouraged by this parable of the "Prodigal Son" to return to the Father's house, and to the Father's love.

It is a blessed thought, that the younger son represents sinners, who are not, as many affirm, outside of God's covenant, but within it, for it evidently means such as belonged to the old covenant by circumcision, and were thereby called to His kingdom of blessedness. In regard to the Christian Church, it means all those who belong to the kingdom of grace by baptism and confirmation, but who have re-

nounced their baptismal covenant, made in their behalf, when infants, by their parents; which they either only renewed with their lips, and not with their hearts, or, perhaps, entirely repudiated. Moreover, such also are meant, who were baptized as adults, who took the oath of fidelity, but who, alas! soon violated it, departing from God, from the Church, from the Father's house, that they might serve sin, thereby bringing disgrace upon themselves, and upon the Church of Christ. All these are represented by the younger son, and are also encouraged by his conduct to return speedily to the Father's house and heart.

We shall divide our exposition of the parable into four parts :

I. *The Prodigal Son at Home in his Father's House.*

II. *His Departure from Home.*

III. *His Return and Reception.*

IV. *The Conduct of the Elder Son.*

## I.

THE PRODIGAL SON AT HOME IN HIS  
FATHER'S HOUSE.1. *His Home, and what he has there.*

HOME! It is difficult to define what home is. A poet was once asked, "What is a poet?" to which he replied, "A poet is—a poet." With equal appropriateness we answer, Home is home.

"Home's not merely four square walls,  
Though with pictures hung and gilded;  
Home is where affection calls—  
Filled with shrines the heart hath builded."

Home is one of the most delightful words in the English language, and it is no wonder that it should have become the subject of poetry and song. There is music in the sound; and in every heart

that is not yet wholly corrupted, there is a chord that vibrates to the note. It will ever awaken a long train of associations and recollections, painful or pleasant, as may have been the conduct of the person by whom the word is repeated. It is at home that parents and children, brothers and sisters, mingle in the sweet fellowship of domestic bliss, as long as Providence permits them to dwell together.

Home has different aspects. The home of the infant is the mother's bosom. The home of the child is the family nursery, with its playthings. The home of the youth is the garden, the meadow, and the play-ground. The home of the man is his country—his native land. The home of the Christian is the Church.

He that loves not his home is a traitor to his country, a hypocrite to his God, and is not to be trusted. It is love of home that inspires man to noble actions;



and only where it is entirely lost, can the sun of a nation's glory and power set in darkness and blood.

"Wherever thou mayest be, *Home* is the centre where the heart turns."

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The parable permits us first to behold the Prodigal Son at home in his father's house, in a state of honor and happiness. "A certain man," says Christ, "had two sons." They were both at home with their father, making each other happy. All that the father owned was theirs; what he acquired, he acquired for them. Every labor and every enjoyment was mutually shared. It was with them, as it is in every happy family: the father commanded, the children obeyed,—and both were not conscious of command or obedience.

The Prodigal Son was therefore at home in his father's house, and, as a child

and son of innocence and love, he was very happy. He possessed everything that could make him happy and honored. There he enjoyed the love of father and of mother; there he had a good name, and could move in the honorable circle of the family.

Was not this the original state of man? God created him upright, innocent, and happy. God was his father; Paradise was his home; the earth his possession; angels were his companions; happiness his blessed lot. Everything that the infinite wisdom and love of his heavenly Father could devise; indeed, everything that man could reasonably enjoy, was provided for him as a divine gift, and was given to him to promote and secure his happiness. Nevertheless, he permitted himself to be conquered by Satan, and fell, and involved all his descendants in sin and misery.



But after the first man, Adam, discovered his loss and misery, the heavenly Father again revealed His love and mercy in choosing the Jewish nation, which He sanctified to Himself by the blood of the atonement. Man was now restored to great happiness and honor.

On account of the redeeming grace of God, we also are able to speak of and rejoice in a still more glorious abiding in our Father's house—the Christian Church. The old Adam led himself and his descendants out of the house of Paradise, by his transgression; the new Adam brought his own back again, by his righteousness and obedience even unto death. The day when He opened the doors, when He removed the angel with the flaming sword, is not yet far removed. It is the blessed Good-Friday. By eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we lost God's protection and were driven from His

house; but our return has been secured for us on the tree of Golgotha, on the cross.

The Christian Church possesses a much higher revelation of God, than that made in creation, or possessed by the house of Israel; so that in it alone the greatest happiness and honor are to be secured.

Holy baptism is the key of the Christian Church — our Father's house. He who remains in the covenant of baptism, who serves in sincere faith and child-like love, who would be nothing other than a child of his heavenly Father, he is in his Father's house, even though he had no earthly house or home in which to lay his head. God's holy purpose of grace is the foundation of this house; His infinite love the walls; His mercy and goodness, which reach as far as the heavens, are the roof; and Christ is the door. So long as we possess a true, child-like faith, and perse-

---

vere in following Christ, do we remain in this house.

The Prodigal Son was in his father's house with honor. Thus he remained for a time in the enjoyment of the highest earthly happiness. But, alas! he became dissatisfied, satiated with his happiness. It was too good for him at home. He would live freer and faster; he would be his own master. To be directed and led by his father's love appeared to him to be compulsion and irksome restraint; he wished to rule himself, and therefore he asked for his portion of goods.

## 2. *A Word of Warning to Parents and Children.*

There is a great responsibility resting upon every parent for the manner in which he or she may bring up their children. We must not forget that their character

for time and for eternity is usually formed in youth, and while at home.

“Have you ever watched an icicle as it formed? You noticed how it froze one drop at a time until it was a foot long, or more. If the water was pure, the icicle remained clear, and sparkled brightly in the sun; but if the water was the least muddy, the icicle looked foul, and its beauty was spoiled. Just so our characters are forming—one little thought or feeling at a time, adds its influence. If each thought be pure and right, the soul will be lovely, and will sparkle with happiness; but if impure and wrong, there will be final deformity and wretchedness.”

How many a drunkard has been induced to visit the tavern, in the first place, in order to escape from the troubled atmosphere of his own home, and the constant reproaches, merited perhaps, but not less

galling, of a too irritable and a too vindictive partner!

On the other hand, how many a gentle spirit has been crushed and broken by the brutal and ruffian remarks of some tyrant husband! How gradually, but with a change far too rapid, has the idol object of "love's first dream" degenerated into a cold, selfish, and indifferent husband!

"One little word, if softly spoken—

One little tear, if kindly shed—

Can heal the spirit bruised and broken,

And cure the heart that long hath bled."

We may be certain that there is something wrong in the disposition of the man or woman who does not eagerly turn home; or whose thoughts are not directed thither. Whoever shuns home as something unpleasant, or is eager to find a pretext to hasten away, has already lost its charms and smiles, and nothing is left but the name of home.

If the best of Fathers had a prodigal, what can be expected of the children of wicked parents? Remember, "childhood is like a mirror, catching and reflecting images from all around it; and that an impious thought, uttered by a parent's lips, may operate like a careless spray of water thrown upon polished steel, staining it with rust, which no after scouring can efface." But how often do parents forget this admonitory thought! Insolent answers and rebellious dispositions in children are passed by unrebuked and unrestrained, yea, even often excused. Need we wonder then, that so many young men go astray, and that there are so many disobedient children and domestic feuds?

Have you, fond father or indulgent mother, nothing wherewith to charge yourself on this score? Are you endeavoring to bring up your children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?"



If so, yours is a Christian home, and when you depart, your children will look back with hearts glowing with grateful recollections, and bless the memory of their departed parents.

“Thou shalt teach,” saith the Lord, “my words diligently unto thy children, and talk of them when thou sittest in thy house.”

Herod slew the bodies of children; but you, by neglecting their spiritual wants, murder their immortal souls. He murdered the children of others, but you would murder your own! He employed others to do it, but you would do it yourself!

If, after the lapse of a few years, your neglected child be taken from you, and consigned to the grave, you will meet it again before the bar of an avenging Judge. It will stand there as a witness against you, and, instead of blessing you, it will

curse you for your parental unfaithfulness, and then "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you."

Father, where is thy son? Where is thy daughter? In what town? In what house? In what company? How is he or she employed? It behooves you to be able to answer these questions by night as well as by day; on Sundays, as well as on week-days; wherever you are, and whatever you are doing. You are the guardian of your children; and whether they are employed at work, or relaxation and amusement, it is your duty to superintend and direct them.

"Plant Virtue, and Content's the fruit."

Hear what David says: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."



### 3. *Young Man, stay at Home.*

By staying at home, as an obedient and faithful son, you will enjoy many advantages and blessings. It is here that your character, for time and for eternity, is usually formed. Your future goodness and greatness is generally determined by the character you form in youth; as the youth, such in all probability will be the man.

By the books you read, we know your disposition; by the company you keep, your character. While at home in your father's house, if you are seen with a stranger, or with a companion of bad or even doubtful character, you are questioned, and warned by your parents. If you bring home a book, it is examined, approved, or rejected and forbidden. If you stay out beyond the usual time, a mother's anxious eye will be turned upon

you, and a father's voice will admonish you. In short, you will feel that you are within the range of an ever-present inspection, and under the pressure of a never-relaxing restraint.

Places of sin and pollution are strictly forbidden, and you may feel little inclination to visit them. Morning and evening you hear the Scriptures read, and the voice of prayer ascending to God in your behalf.

“There, angels bright,  
Came down at night,  
To watch” *your* “pulse’s play;  
Their shadowy wings,  
In circling rings,  
Went up at break of day.”

But once away from your father's house, you will soon fall into temptation and sin. Your proud and unsubdued heart will whisper: “Thy father will not be here to see it, if you sin; thy mother will not

know it. You are under no inspection now; restraint is removed. You can go where you like, associate with whom you please, and fear neither rebuke nor restraint."

Oh! what base and wicked suggestions are those, which lead a young man to take advantage of a father's absence, and to do that which he knows would provoke his strongest reprobation, and fill his heart with the bitterest grief.

"The devil is ever watchful and ready to whisper into the ear of a young man away from home, that parental will and restriction is over; it is time for you to think and act for yourself,—you are your own master. You are now a young man, and no longer a child. You are capable of judging, discriminating, and determining between right and wrong. You have the right to select your own books, to form your own standard of morals, to

choose your own company, and to lay your own plans of action. Who has authority now to interfere with you ?”

How many a proud young man has gone from his father’s house, from his native place, to live among strangers, as the Prodigal did ; far from home, and farther still from God, among a people to whom God is not known !

You may, by your wicked life, “ break the hearts of your parents ; make your brothers and sisters ashamed to own you ; be a nuisance and pest to society, a bane to your country, the corrupter of youthful morals, the seducer of female virtue, the consumer of the property of your friends ; and, to reach the climax of your mischief, you may be the *Apollyon* of the circle of immortal souls in which you move, sending some to perdition before you reach it yourself, and causing others to follow you to the bottomless pit, where you shall

never escape the sight of their torments, nor the sound of their imprecations !”

“ How great the power of sin, and how malignant its virulence, that can spread its influence so widely, and exert its force with such deadly effect, not only destroying the sinner himself, but involving others in his ruin !” No man goes alone to perdition ; no one perishes alone in his iniquity ; as we sin together, so we shall also be damned together.

Hearken then, oh sinner ! Here is something that you should ponder well, for you not only sustain the character of a suicide, but of a murderer, and of all murderers the worst, for you are the murderer of souls !

What a critical position you occupy ! You are capable of rising to so much excellence, or of sinking to ruin so deep, and misery so intense !

Reflect, and be wise ; consider well

your latter end, and stay in your father's house :

“Thou shalt have no occasion of fear,  
From the dread by night;  
From the arrow that flieth by day;  
From the pestilence in darkness walking;  
From the cutting off which destroys at noon-day.”

You know not the deceitfulness of your heart, nor the corrupting influences that are around you. You are led on by a gradual progress in a guilty career, till the measure of sin is filled. Who that ever ended his days on the scaffold, or in the felon's dungeon, would, at one period of his life, have thought it possible that he could ever have become so wicked and hardened as to commit crimes of such desert?

Habit renders all things easy, even the most atrocious crimes; and habits of vice, like other habits, begin with acts, many of them trifling ones. The most alarming



view of sin is its progressive nature. Sin is the most deceitful thing in the universe. This is manifest from the insidious manner in which it leads the transgressor in his way, ever furnishing him with excuses at every stage of progress he makes, until he is hopelessly lost.

Look at our city courts. What a vast number of criminals are charged with, and convicted of all kinds of crimes, from the smallest to the greatest and basest! Not long since a paper headed its criminal column with the words: "An army of burglars and thieves." Day after day crimes of the darkest dye are perpetrated; robbery after robbery, and murder after murder, are committed. The devil incarnate is walking, as it were, in broad daylight through our land, and no one takes warning. Where will it end? and what will become of us? may well be asked by serious minds.

“I can imagine you,” says one, “in the day of judgment, pressing to lay hold upon the hand of your father, but he turns from you as from an object of disgust, exclaiming, ‘Your father no longer!’ You then direct an imploring look to the mother that bore you, and, laying hold on her robe, you piteously exclaim: ‘My mother, do you not know me?’ Gathering up her garments of light, she shakes you off with the dreadful disownment: ‘I know not the enemies of the Lord.’ They pass to the right hand of the Judge, while you, by a power you cannot resist, are sent to the left — and what remains? You will present from that day the melancholy spectacle of an outcast from heaven, a homeless immortal, a vagrant in the universe, a wretched wanderer through eternity.”

“So do the dark in soul expire,  
Or live like scorpions girt by fire;



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So writhes the mind remorse hath riven,  
Unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven —  
Darkness above, despair beneath,  
Around it flame, within it death.”

Stop here and ask, Lord, am I this thoughtless son, this child of perdition? Do, perhaps, foolish thoughts also dwell in my soul, which should be humble and lowly? Has, perhaps, the power of self-will also broken the bonds of love in my case, which should bind me to my heavenly Father, and to His service? Do I also live after the lusts of the flesh, and in the turmoil of pleasure, without the fear of God, suppressing the warning voice of conscience in the service of sin? Am I also one of those who despise the relation of child-like dependence on the father, and have I forgotten the child-like reverence, which I owe to my father, as also the confiding love, which makes it my duty to obey my father's will? If so,

then listen to the gracious invitation :  
“Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Come in, ye halt, and lame, and blind, there yet is room. Are you within ? then remain there. Do you stand on the threshold, in order to go out ? then look back once more, reflect once more, what grace and what peace your fathers, who lived before you, enjoyed in this house, which is the Church of God.

And you, who have already gone out, think yet once more, what you have received and enjoyed since you abandoned your blessed Savior. If you would answer honestly, you would say : “ Since then I have no foundation on which I can stand, no walls to protect me against the assaults of temptation, no roof, beneath which I may enjoy rest in trouble, or peace in death. It was much better when I was at home in my father’s house.” So re-

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main within ! close the doors ! admit not the tempter ! close the shutters, your ears, against his enticing words. Therefore remain within !

“ Now in the heat of youthful blood  
Remember your Creator, God ;  
Behold the months come hastening on,  
When you shall say, my joys are gone.

“ Behold the aged sinner goes,  
Laden with sin and heavy woes,  
Down from the regions of the dead,  
With endless curses on his head.

“ Children, in years and knowledge young,  
Attend the counsels of my tongue ;  
Your parent’s hope, your parent’s joy,  
Let pious thoughts your mind employ.

“ If you desire a length of days,  
Restrain your feet from impious ways ;  
Love Christ, and all the good and great,  
And peace shall crown your mortal state.

“ God from on high beholds your thoughts,  
His book records your secret faults,  
The works of darkness you have done,  
Must all appear before the sun.

“The vengeance to your follies due,  
Should strike your hearts with terror through ;  
How will you stand before His face,  
Or answer for His injured grace.

“Almighty God, turn oft the eyes  
Of youth from sin and vanities ;  
And let the thunder of Thy word,  
Awake their souls to fear the Lord.”\*

#### 4. *His Ungrateful Request.*

On a certain day the younger son came and said to his father : “Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.”†

His request sounds as if it were right and almost imperious, and is at the same time a clear evidence that he had lost all love for his father and for his home ; for without even having an apparent right, he demands of his father the part of his goods that would fall to his share after his father’s death. It is not necessary to

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\* By Dr. Harbaugh, written for this work.

† Luke 15 : 12.

affirm, that the younger son claimed "the portion of goods" as a right, but only as a favor; "That portion which will hereafter fall to me, which thou designest for me at last, I would rather have it now and go to foreign lands, in order to trade with it."

This portion, according to the Jewish law, would be only the third part; for the elder son would receive twice as much as the younger. "But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the first-born, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the first-born is his."\*

What does this request mean, when we give it its spiritual significance? It is a proof that man would be independent of God, that he would be a God to himself and live according to his own will. "For God doth know, that in the day ye eat

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\* Deut. 21 : 17.



thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." \*

Such an one is a man that has grown weary of God and of God's blessing, and imagines that he is able to order and support his own life. He seeks to cast off the rule of his father, and thinks that he can manage his own affairs best. What was the first sin, but the rejection of all divine restrictions? Although these were reasonable and designed to promote the well-being of man, yet he would act according to his own will, and have his power and goods in his own hands, believing that he could be a fountain of blessedness to himself.

All the subsequent sins of the younger son are included in this one, and are but the development of this, the sin of sins.

The true Christian feeling is directly

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\* Gen. 3 : 5.

opposite to the request, "Give me my portion of goods." The Christian prays, it is true, daily, "Give us this day our daily bread." But therein he acknowledges that he looks up to God for the supply of all his bodily and spiritual needs. The earthly relationship which supplies the ground-work of this parable, where the son first grows weary of receiving from the father, and soon leaves his father's house, is much narrower than the heavenly one; though the contempt of the earthly relationship, of the earthly father, is also a contempt of the heavenly relationship, of the heavenly father.

How often is it forgotten that:

"From the *Family* we pass into the *School*;  
Out of the *School* into the *Church*;  
Out of the *Church* into *Heaven*."

The earthly relationship should lead us into the knowledge of the blessings laid up in the heavenly; and when chil-



dren despise the earthly relationship, then the higher and heavenly one will also be despised. How many children treat their parents, just as this son did? approaching them with the same ungrateful insolence, as he did his father, in order to be rid of all their restraints. They forget the fifth commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee."

## II.

## HIS DEPARTURE FROM HOME.

1. *The Division of the Goods.*

“Thankless, the Prodigal receives  
The bounty of his sire,  
Rejoicing only in the hope  
To have his own desire.

“And far from home, in climes of vice,  
He joins the heedless throng;  
Begins in pleasure to rejoice,  
And chants the mirthful song.”

At the request, “Father, give me my portion of goods,” a division was made. He not only gave the younger son his portion, but also the elder his portion; with the difference, however, that the younger son got his portion into his own

hands, whilst the father still managed that of the elder, who remained at home. The father gave the younger son his portion, well knowing that it would profit nothing to retain him at home, for his love towards his father had grown cold, and he had become, in heart, estranged to that home.

How did this come to pass with the younger son? When one goes out in the morning to cut weeds, the sickle is sharp, and cuts well; but as the day advances, it becomes blunt. So it is often also with the discipline of children. Commonly the sins and misconduct of the older children are punished with sharpness, but when it comes to younger ones, it has already become blunt. We would accomplish everything in regard to them with the words of love, but we often reap from them only cursing and ingratitude.

The younger son did not bear his yoke

well in his youth. Therefore he would now cast it off entirely, and depart with his goods.

But what have you to demand, or to call your own? Your soul belongs to God your Father, for when He created you, He breathed into you the breath of life. Your body is also His, for He formed you in the womb. Your goods are His, for He is the eternal lender, who has loaned them to you for a time, and you will never be able to acquire a clear and full title to them.

Do you wish to be rid of your Father and of God by the division of the goods, then see, what kind of a spirit it is that rules the servants of sin, and what slaves they are. The one is ruled by pleasure, the other by avarice, and the third by pride; learn to know, therefore, that true freedom consists only in obedience to God.

“If the son makes you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

By this division of the goods the father gave him an additional evidence of his love, in order to see, whether, perhaps, he would not repent; and whether he might not by this favor regain his love. But all was in vain.

Man is a spiritual being, and has a free will. If God's service becomes irksome to him, and he promises greater freedom to himself elsewhere, God does not hinder him from making the trial, and from making the woful experience, that true freedom and true happiness are to be found alone in Him; that departing from Him, he inevitably falls under the horrible bondage of his own lust and of the world, and under the tyranny of the devil.

Therefore do not depart from the household of faith, or the wild, roving bands of Satan will lead you into snares and

destroy you ; but rather, when under sore trial, and temptation, ask your Redeemer, whom your soul loveth, where He feedeth His flock, and where He shelters His people from the scorching sun of trial and tribulation, He will softly answer thee, Walk in the footsteps of the Apostles, and Martyrs, and Confessors, and Saints, and bring your children up in the sanctuary of the Lord your God, and you shall be safe from the path of the destroyer. Hear therefore, O sinner :

“The Devil comes with all his craft,  
The world with vanity and pride ;  
The flesh with lust, where’er thou art,  
Comes to ensnare thee and destroy.”

Now the younger son is that which he desired, lord of himself, but also heir of his own folly, as we shall soon see.

He receives his portion. “And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a



far country." That is, after several days he left his father's house.

The apostasy of the heart always precedes the outward apostasy of the life, though the last sooner or later follows the first.

But the inconsiderate youth could not tear himself away at once; there was still something that drew him to his father. He only left his father after several days.

He first turned everything that fell to his share into money, or into valuables that he could easily carry with him, "and took his journey into a far country." That is, he collected all his energies, with the determination of getting, through their help, all the gratification he could out of the world; he now turned his back upon God, his heavenly Father.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child."





HIS DEPARTURE FROM HIS FATHER.

(See page 66.)



His father told him of his danger, reminded him of the happy life they had thus far led together, which he would find nowhere else; but the son had lost all love for domestic happiness; it was no longer pleasant for him to be with his father. His father took leave of him with tears and fears. He apprehended that the young man would be unfortunate, that he would lose his child.

He now went from the house of his father into the world of sin and folly. His father, his mother, his sisters and brother looked after him with weeping eyes and anxious hearts. Friends approached him, and sought to convince him of his error, and to demonstrate to him the love and goodness of his father, as well as the danger to which he was exposing himself. But it was all in vain. Nothing was able to move his hard heart. Go he would,

and go he did. He apprehended nothing of the danger which he approached, but visions of freedom and happiness seduced him onward.

“Buds are filling, leaves are swelling,  
Flowers on field and bloom on tree ;  
O’er the earth, and air and ocean,  
Nature holds her jubilee.”

Sin is the separation of the soul from God ; to sin means to wander away from communion with God, and this way only leads farther and farther away from God.

Whoever forsakes the assembling of the faithful, becomes lukewarm, and quickly cold in heart towards God, and more and more careless about heavenly things, and is soon offended ; and falls an easy prey to the wicked one.

We hear the rattlings of the world upon every street and high-way, but the road to the house of God is comparatively silent. Where money is to be made, honor

to be gained, pleasure to be enjoyed, and time to be killed; there is all life and activity. And what is worse, many even who attend to the sacred ordinances of God's house, have not always the purest motives, for

“Some go to church just for a walk,  
Some go there, to laugh and talk,  
Some go there the time to spend,  
Some go there to meet a friend,  
Some go to learn the parson's name,  
Some go there to wound his fame,  
Some go there for speculation,  
Some go there for observation,  
Some go there to doze and nod,  
But few go there to worship God.”

The heart first looks upon the forbidden fruit. Then follow desire and consent to the temptation, and the perpetration of the sin rapidly succeeds. “When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and



sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” \*

This departure from God is not instantaneous, but it proceeds step by step. It, however, goes forward very rapidly. At first the erring one is absent from the table of the Lord, then he withdraws gradually from the prayer-meetings; he goes no more to church; sings and prays no more with the people of God.

On the Sabbath he is found fishing, or gunning, perhaps in the tavern, or even sitting among the scoffers of religion; at the card-table, or in houses of ill-fame, and he becomes not only a Sabbath-breaker, but also a despiser of God and sacred things. He hardens his heart and loses all fear of God, respect for himself and better men. He drinks in sin and vice as water, and is at last abhorred and avoided by all good men.

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\* James 1 : 15.

The Prodigal Son was, no doubt, happy in his freedom in a foreign country, but only so long as his goods lasted. He ate and drank of the best; he wore the best clothing, and had numerous servants. He did as he pleased; the gratification of his desires was his only work, the only duty that he acknowledged. Home, brother, father, mother, everything was forgotten: he is full and happy for the short time that it continued.

“Live while you live, the Epicure will say,  
And take the pleasure of the present day:  
Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,  
And give to God each moment as it flies.  
Lord, in my view, let both united be —  
I live in pleasure when I live in thee.”

The liberal love of his father furnished him with sufficient means. He thought as little of employing himself usefully, as he did of want and privation. He would spend his youth in enjoyment and



pleasure, and for this he had every means. He also did not lack pleasant acquaintances and glad companions. For whoever is rich, will find everywhere, even in foreign lands, so-called friends, who will gladly attach themselves to him, and, if he is deficient in experience and prudence, they will soon profit by him. Thus, in his opinion, the thoughtless young man had nothing more to wish for. Cheerful and without care, he spent his days in riotous living.

The "far distant country" is a country where God does not dwell. There he spent his goods in debauchery.

What is meant by "wasted his substance with riotous living?" This may refer to the time which God gives us to work out our salvation; or to the treasures and riches of the earth; for that was a part of the portion which he desired; this he might consume and spend

on harlots; or it might refer to his gifts and natural powers, and abilities, or to his conscience, which his sins had wasted away. More particularly, however, to the rich gifts and blessings which he received in the Church, and to the holy influences under which he was brought up, as a son of the kingdom of God.

Thus also the sinner may imagine, that he is doing well in his estrangement from God; for the world has its allurements, the flesh its pleasures. The Prodigal Son did not at once, but only gradually, discover his error.

One piece of clothing after another was sold; one debt upon another was made, and it became every day less possible for him to pay them.

He was able to live for a long time from his goods, but they were finally all spent; that is, everything was enjoyed that the world offered. After his means

had been consumed, he found nothing but misery in the world of sin. "He began to be in want." Instead of the choicest food, he had now no bread; instead of the most costly clothes, only rags to cover his nakedness. He now looked around for his friends. He would now eat and drink with those who formerly ate and drank with him. But when he called upon them the first time, they were not at home; the second, they had nothing themselves; the third time, they did not know him, and could not recollect that they had ever helped to consume his goods; the fourth time, they gave him good advice: he had much property, and should have taken better care of it. Now he discovered that his false friends were like birds of passage, who remain with us as long as the weather is warm, the grain in the field, and the grapes on the vine; but as soon as these

are gone, they depart also. Every one fawned upon him before ; now no one regarded him.

He also began to experience, that there was a famine in the land, a famine of truth and of love, and of all nourishment for the soul. He now saw, that he had made a bad bargain.

This was but a foretaste of his coming woe, and without doubt, a call to return home ; but man is, according to the Scriptures, blind, deaf, and dead ; he hears not the voice of his God and Father, when He invites and calls him to return.

“Stop, poor sinners, stop and think,  
Before you further go ;  
Will you sport upon the brink  
Of everlasting woe ?  
On the verge of ruin stop,  
Now the friendly warning take ;  
Stay your footsteps, ere ye drop  
Into the burning lake.

“ Say, have you an arm like God,  
That you His will oppose?  
Fear ye not that iron rod  
With which He breaks His foes?  
Can you stand in that dread day,  
Which His justice shall proclaim,  
When the earth shall melt away,  
Like wax before the flame?

“ Ghastly death will quickly come,  
And drag you to His bar;  
Then to hear your awful doom,  
Will fill you with despair.  
All your sins will round you crowd;  
You shall mark their crimson dye;  
Each for vengeance crying loud;  
And what can you reply?

“ Though your heart be made of steel,  
Your forehead lined with brass;  
God at length will make you feel,  
He will not let you pass.  
Sinners then in vain will call,  
Those who now despise His grace,  
Rocks and mountains on us fall,  
And hide us from His face.”

But his proud heart would not yet bow, for his self-confidence was not entirely exhausted.

Why is it, that sinners are so hard to be convinced of sin?

It may be because sin is of such a bewitching nature, and has got such deep root in their hearts and affections, that they are naturally wedded to their lusts; their alienation from God is deep, and because the devil has such hold and power over them, that he constantly deceives and beguiles them.

“A little sleep, a little slumber,  
A little folding of the arms to sleep;  
So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth,  
And thy want as an armed man.”

My dear reader, in looking around you, how many prodigal sons and daughters can you not count in your neighborhood, who were, perhaps, your acquaintances, school-



companions, or fellow-Christians, who have ruined themselves in a like manner? Learn wisdom, therefore, from this parable, and remain in your father's house.

## 2. *His Misery and Poverty.*

“Life's a folly, age a dream,  
Borne along the common stream;  
Earth's a bubble, light as air,  
If my rest is centered there.  
How can that be solid joy,  
Which a moment may destroy?”

It is not said, that man must be poor in worldly goods, when he has lost his spiritual ones, — his true riches. The want of the soul is also to be found as an uninvited guest at the table of the rich, in the palaces of kings, and at all earthly feasts; and the soul often suffers more want and poverty in these places, than in the huts of the poor.

This being in want portrays as well the



great apostasy of the heathen world, which seeks in vain to satisfy itself with empty husks, as the case of a single soul. All men are conscious that a sinful life is both an expensive and a miserable life.

Look at the habitual drunkard. His life is one of misery and shame. He is, in a fearful sense, the mere sport of a demon. However kind, gentle, and generous he may be in his sober moments, the chances are as a thousand to one, that when under the influence of liquor, he will either become as an idiot, a brute, or a fiend. All sense of propriety will be forgotten, — all dignity of character will be thrown aside.

Many hearts have been broken, many families have been impoverished, and many human beings have been hurried into premature graves, through the agency of intemperance! The catalogue, if it could be obtained, would present a terrible

array indeed. Fond and favorite sons have become outcasts and vagabonds, and doting parents have wept bitter tears over the fallen and degraded. Character has been destroyed, health has been ruined, and even murder has been committed through the agency of this terrible vice. There is scarcely a family in the land, that has not, or does not now suffer to a greater or less extent from it. Some of the loftiest intellects have yielded to it, some of the noblest hearts have fallen beneath its fell power.

And yet the drunkard's prayer is still heard: "There's my money—give me drink. There's my clothing—give me drink. There's the clothing, food, and fuel of my wife and children,—There's the education of my children, the price of my house, the rent I have robbed my landlord of—give me drink. Pour me out drink, I will yet pay more for it.

There's my health of body and peace of mind,—my character as a man and my profession as a Christian, I will give all for drink. Yea, I have still more to give. There's my heavenly inheritance, and the eternal friendship of the redeemed — there — there — is my hope of salvation! I will give up my Savior! I will give up my God! I will resign all that is great, and good, and glorious in the universe — I will give up all for drink."

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babblings? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." Prov. 23 : 29-33.

Again, to what an awful extent is not the vice of *gambling* carried on in our land. Not only do gambling establishments exist by scores in our large cities, but there are also many like establishments in our towns and villages, where the fortunes and souls of men are ruined forever. The whole system of gambling is a tissue of dishonesty, deceit, hypocrisy, and fraud. The gambler covets his neighbor's property; his object is to win it, honestly if he can, dishonestly if he must. The gambler is

“A polished, subtle knave, with mellow voice,  
But heart as hard as iron.”

Oh! what a tale will be told at the day of judgment against gambling “Hells.” Thousands of young men have been, and are still being, ruined in them. They are sinks of cold, hard-hearted fraud and iniquity. The heart must be hard, indeed, that can excuse or encourage

such a system of downright robbery, which ruthlessly beggars the unguarded, carries anxiety and anguish into the family circle, and leads many men to desperation and suicide. And no wonder, for it is said that \$20,000,000 are annually gambled away at faro in New York.

Oh! my young friends, heed the timely warning if the gambling-table has allurements for you—forsake it at once. These gambling “hells” are surely the outer courts of that other *hell*, “where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”

If you have never been within them, never enter, for in them the road to ruin begins.

The worship of *Mammon* is another one of the prevailing passions of our country. The desire for wealth is so strong, that principle and honor are disregarded in its pursuit. Success is often made to

sanctify vice and dishonesty, and the infamous doctrine is endorsed, "Make money, my son, honestly if you can, but by all means make money."

An immortal mind grovelling in the dust, and having for its highest aim the accumulation of wealth, which is never to be enjoyed! while despising those incorruptible riches which shall endure forever! Whoever tasted the pleasures and comforts of religion, can but pity the poor wretch whose soul is chained to earthly treasures, and tortured on the rack of avarice! Will the recollection of bags of gold, and chests of dollars, treasured up in this fleeting world for profligate heirs, alleviate the anguish of the miser's soul in the place of punishment? Will the gay and licentious worldling find his torments assuaged by revolving the idea, that he was transported to hell in a splendid chariot? and that his de-



generate offspring, left behind, will follow in the same pomp to the place of misery? Alas! such recollections will only increase your pain, and add new fuel to the fire which will never be quenched.

“Oh, cursed lust of Gold! when for thy sake  
The fool throws up his interest in both worlds;  
First starves in this, then damned in that to  
come.”

How frequently, when a young lady is spoken of as possessing all the qualifications that adorn her sex, do we hear the question asked, “Is she rich?” instead of, is she virtuous, intelligent, and pious!

Thus our sons and daughters grow up under the false impression, that money is the one thing needful. Vice in silk and lace is preferred to virtue in calico.

*Dancing* is another one of our fashionable sins and follies, and it is not only detrimental to health, but highly injurious to morals. Many, very many, dis-

eases are contracted in the ball-room, which hurry their victims to the grave.

“The song, the dance, the midnight hour,  
With pale consumption hovering by.”

It is equally, if not more destructive of purity and virtue. “We have often been amazed,” says Dr. Tyng, “that any parent of pure moral taste could allow a daughter to mingle in dances under any pretext. We will not describe them. They are too well known to require it. That they are disgusting, and tend to gross moral corruption, cannot be successfully denied. And yet Christians, at least in name, are found to countenance them by their presence, and sometimes—we are ashamed to write it—even by their own participation. And even those who do not attend such places and amusements themselves, do not hesitate to send their children to dancing-school, to learn and to acquire the taste that can only be

gratified in after life in these ungodly and corrupting pleasures."

Even thus it is with all vices,—they are painful and demoralizing. Go ask the condemned criminal in his chains, he will confess, that a sinful life is both an expensive and a miserable one. Or transpose yourself with me in spirit into the kingdom of the damned, and ask that father: "Why so restless?" that mother: "Why in tears?" that son, that daughter: "Why so unhappy?" or that infidel there, who curses the day of his birth: "Why so hopeless?" they will all answer: "This is the reward of sin." Oh! the life of sin is a painful and miserable life. And from ten thousand voices, out of the bottomless abyss, sounds the wail:

Eternity! — that awful sound!

O sound, that pierces through my soul!

O element, without an end!

Eternity ! time without time !

I know not for this grief of mine,

Whither it will lead or tend !

My troubling soul affrighted quakes,

Whene'er *this Word* within me 'wakes.

And it is thus with all sins and vices, excepting only avarice, which gnaws and consumes the inner life of the sinner. Pride, ambition, licentiousness, all destroy those who are the victims of them.

The Prodigal Son, therefore, wasted all his portion by riotous living. A rich inheritance was consumed, and that in a short time.

Now "a mighty famine arose in that land." Though God calls louder and louder, does he hear? Does he retrace his steps? No! He only falls deeper and deeper into the misery of sin and of destruction, not obeying the after call of his father:

“Awake, O man, and from thee shake  
This heavy sleep of sin !  
Soon shall the highest vengeance take ;  
Soon shall His wrath begin  
To smite the wretched sinner home ;  
In awful terrors He shall come,  
To mete to all on earth their due reward,  
Only the righteous spares our angry Lord.

“Come then, ye sinners, great and small,  
Weeping and mourning sore,  
Low down before His footstool fall,  
And vow to sin no more.  
In faith and godliness array  
Your souls against that final day ;  
So shall ye 'scape His wrath, and blessed die,  
Heirs of the kingdom with our Lord on high.”

### 3. *His External Embarrassment.*

“There is a moral of all human tales ;  
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past ;  
First freedom, and then glory—when that fails,  
Wealth, vice, corruption—barbarism at last.”

The sinner, after being disappointed  
and made miserable, as he harvests the

fruits of his sins, ventures still into greater and deeper ones, and every one becomes a bud that stimulates to new transgressions; his moral feeling is more and more blunted, his conscience more and more deadened; as we see from the parable of the unjust steward, who fearing his removal from office, deprives his master still further of other property, in order thereby to fasten himself upon his creditors, that he might find a living and a home to hide his shame.

Even so the Prodigal, after having spent his fortune, and being in want, he hangs himself upon a wicked citizen of a far country.

This citizen, says St. Bernard, is Satan himself, or one of his angels; more probably one of the malignant spirits, who has, by voluntarily, wilfully and maliciously sinning, subjected himself to



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Satan, and has thereby become a citizen in the land of sin.

The word "citizen" indicates the distinction between the Prodigal Son and the man with whom, for a while, he connected himself. The Prodigal Son, with all his misery, was not a "citizen," but a stranger, in that far land. He did not naturalize himself there, neither did he feel himself at home. And there is also hope for the greatest sinner, so long as he feels himself a stranger in the land of sin; but when he has once become a citizen there, when he is troubled with no longings after a lost paradise, after a better land that he has left behind; oh! then his case is hopeless.

"He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country." That is, the sinner sells himself to the world; he entangles himself more deeply in it, until

he has enjoyed its pleasures, and the world uses him as its drudge.

The help which he received from his new master was small. This is an evidence, that the sinner finds no mercy, no love, no pity, from his fellow-sinner. "Behold," says the Lord, "therefore, I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness."\*

This new master, to whom he joined himself in his want, cared not whether he had him or not; and if he must needs engage him, who so adhered to him for a morsel of bread, he will send him away from his presence to the meanest and vilest employment which he has. "He sent him into his fields to feed swine."

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\* Ezek. 16 : 37.

A striking picture of the shame and nameless misery into which sin plunges man.

The spendthrift becomes a swine-herd, the vilest and most degraded of employments in the eyes of a Jew; so that misery would seem to have come upon him to the uttermost. A swine-herd was accursed among the Jews.

Behold, what degrading employment Satan gives to his servants! How does such a man sink from one degree of misery to another, covered with shame and disgrace, until his soul mingles with the lowest and vilest! As swine-herd, "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him."

"He gathered dust when he had hoped to see  
The richest fruits; the buds that promised  
fair  
Were early blasted, or but grew to be  
A mockery—a harvest of despair."

By these *Fields and Swine*, we understand the ungodly multitudes that meet together to gratify their sensual lusts; these are *Satan's fields*, where nothing grows, but what comes up spontaneously.

Vain, wicked, and profane fellows, and impudent harlots, may be compared to swine, because they have the evil qualities of those brutish creatures, therefore Christ says, "cast not your pearls before swine."

Again, swine are also unclean creatures; they love to wallow in mud, filth, and miry places. Thus these ungodly mortals love their brutish lusts, and to wallow in the mud and mire of filth, and abominable pollution of sin, and uncleanness. And as it seems pleasant to swine to wallow in the mire, even so it is natural and pleasant to these sinners to wallow in all beastly sins, lusts, and filthiness.

Again, swine are craving, and very

greedy creatures; they have no measure in eating and drinking, they eat till they almost burst; so these wicked and ungodly persons are so greedy and unsatisfied, that they set no bounds nor measure to their lusts, though they consume all they have; some are mere epicures, gluttonous persons; and others, like swine, will drink until they can neither stand nor go, and wallow in their own filthy vomit.

Swine, if washed, will soon return to their wallowing in the mire; so if any ungodly persons are outwardly reformed, or washed from gross acts of wickedness, their natures being not changed, commonly return again to their former evil and filthy courses; so that in them the proverb is made good, "the sow that was washed is returned to her wallowing in the mire again."

Swine also feed on husks and grains, but never look up from whence they

came, and tread pearls under their feet; so these brutish creatures feed on trash, the husks and grains of this world, and tread under their feet the pearls of grace—all heavenly and spiritual things.

These “husks” are the fruit of the carob tree, which grows in Syria, Judea, Spain, and the northern part of Africa, and are used for the feeding of domestic animals; perhaps it was the sweet fruit of the St. John’s bread tree, which, on account of its abundance, was very cheap, and although sweet, was nevertheless unhealthy.

This fruit is something like a bean-pod, and its name in the original means, “little horn.” By these “husks,” in their spiritual sense, we generally understand the vanities of the world, as riches, honors, and pleasures, or “the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of



life ;” or whatsoever things are of this world, and not of the Father, are husks.

There is, however, one great difference between *natural* and *metaphorical swine*. The first retain their nature, and can never be anything else but swine ; the second may have their brutish nature changed, and by the power of divine grace, become sheep and lambs of Jesus Christ.

Now, by feeding swine may be indicated a going among the very lowest of the wicked, either to taverns, ale-houses, play-houses, &c. ; and diverting them with profane and idle tales, or filthy talk and stories ; for such things those wretches feed upon, as their meat and drink ; or he may have fed them also by gratifying their base and brutish lusts, as is done by such as keep company with harlots.

By feeding swine may also be meant that Satan prevailed upon him to let

loose the reins of *his lusts*, and to deny himself nothing that his sensitive parts could desire, in order to crush the storm of conscience, which was rising on account of the famine; which no doubt was a call of God, and a dread of his future state, and denoted his fear of perishing forever.

Thus it must be evident that the wretched Prodigal has, under sore convictions of conscience, thus assented to Satan's suggestions, to go and feed swine, by which means his conscience was again put to sleep. But all that he could expect from these husks, was but to dull the gnawing pain of hunger, not that he should with them satisfy it, for we know that the food of beasts could not appease the cravings of man.

Where are now his former companions? Why does he not now return to his former resorts of pleasure and vice? Oh, sin is

the heaviest and most dreadful of evils ! Sinners sacrifice each other. The greatest mercy that can be expected from the wicked, is terrible. All his companions now turned their backs upon him, and would not know him. He is now even too mean for them. They are ashamed of him, and because his money is all spent, he can find a refuge nowhere.

“But lo, the famine coming on,  
Now dies the song profane ;  
The youth beholds his substance gone,  
And begs the husk in vain.

“The terrors of the world to come  
Have struck his pleasures dead —  
And far from God — and far from home,  
His every friend has fled.”

The son who would not be treated liberally by his father, is compelled to be the servant and slave of a foreign master, — he who would not be ruled by God is compelled to serve the devil, — he who

would not abide in his father's royal palace, is sent to the field among servants, — he who would not dwell among brethren and princes, is obliged to be the servant and companion of swine,—he who would not feed on the bread of angels, begs in his hunger for the husks of the swine.

Thus do sin and the pleasures of the world reward those who entirely suppress the divine in them, and permit the animal and sensual to rule them; and the attempt to satisfy the hunger of the soul with such husks, is fruitless.

What a picture this of a man, who seeks to appease the hunger of the immortal soul by unlimited sensual gratification! The great misery is, that the hope of appeasing his hunger becomes continually less, and the pangs continually sharper, and the bonds of his slavery heavier, and the hope of casting them off ever diminishing.

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All the monstrous luxuries and frantic wickednesses which we read of in the later Roman history, at the close of the world's Pagan epoch, stand there like the last despairing effort of man to fill his belly with the husks. All the wishes of her emperors and nobles could be carried out under all circumstances by wealth and power. In this light we may behold the incredibly sumptuous feasts, the golden palaces, the enormous shows and spectacles, and all the pomp and pride of life carried to the uttermost, the sins of nature, and the sins below nature. But because from amidst all these the voice of human misery only made itself the louder heard, this attempt only proved the more plainly, that the heathen system of morals was only food for bestial sensuality, and not nourishment for the human soul.

In this parable we have placed before

our view a man who has done evil with both hands earnestly, and debased himself even unto hell.

The Prodigal Son has sunk into this misery. Compare his present with his former condition, when he was still at home, surrounded with joy and wealth.

Behold his pale, sickly face ; his filthy, torn, and ragged garments. See him performing his accursed work, for a Rabbi says : “ Accursed are all who feed swine.”

Behold the sad result of his departure from home. Truly, “ the way of the transgressor is hard.” Thus, says one : “ when a great English Poet, with every thing that fortune, and rank, and genius, could give him, — and who had laid out his whole life for pleasure, and not for duty — yet before he had reached half the allotted period of man, already exclaimed,” —



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“My days are in the yellow leaf,  
The flowers, the fruits, of love are gone;  
The worm, the canker, and the grief  
Are mine alone —”

What are these deeply affecting words, but the confession of one, who having spent all, had found himself in want? Or again, the Prodigal's misery, his sense of the barrenness of sin, find a yet deeper voice : —

“The fire that on my bosom preys,  
Is lone as some volcanic isle;  
No torch is lighted at its blaze,  
A funeral pile !”

## III.

## HIS RETURN AND RECEPTION.

HITHERTO we have followed the Prodigal Son step by step in his sinful career, which carried him further and further from God. Now we will consider his better side—what befell him in the depth of his misery ; his conversion, his return to his father, and his restoration as a son in his father's family.

He had, indeed, departed far in the service of sin, and had engaged in a most dishonorable occupation far from his father's home, and found himself altogether helpless. He had no friend, who could speak to him a word of sympathy, of comfort, and of encouragement. He now, without doubt, thought of his affectionate, forgotten father, as also of his brother and

the happy life he formerly led with them. But all this was but a sad remembrance of lost happiness.

In this misery he cries out of the depth of his soul : “ I perish with hunger ! ”

“ The Prodigal, with streaming eyes,  
From folly just awake,  
Reviews his wanderings with surprise ;  
His heart begins to break.

“ I starve, he cries, nor can I bear  
The famine in this land.  
While servants of my father share  
The bounty of his hand. ”

Though he had forsaken God, he had not been forsaken by Him in the “ far country.” God, indeed, hates sin, but He loves the sinner. He hedges up his way with thorns. “ Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.” \*

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\* Hosea 2 : 6.

As if he would say "it was I that made an hedge and a wall, when thou wast beginning to turn to things in which I delighted not. It was I that made thy sweet bitter, thy day night, thy smooth way thorny. It was I that stirred up thy conscience and understanding, thy will and thy affections, after thy great and woful decay. It was I that put life into thee, O my son! to seek me that thou mightest find me, and in finding, find thine own health, and happiness, and salvation."

God makes his sin bitter to him, that he may leave it. He allows the world to make its bondage hard to sinners, that they may know the difference between His service and the service of sin. "Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries." \*

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\* 2 Chron. 12: 8.

Here we have an example, where the severity of loving paternal discipline is not in vain. The dark side of his sinful life is now past. He begins to reflect. He stands still — his misery brings him to reflection.

1. *He came to Himself.*

How deeply significant are these words, "*he came to himself!*" To come to one's self and to come to God, is one and the same thing. When we find ourselves we find Him, who is the true ground of our being and of our life; or rather, as St. Augustine says: "To find God, is to find ourselves."

Where did he begin to consider his situation and to reflect upon himself with earnestness? Not at the richly furnished table, where wine makes the heart glad and dispels all care; not amid his excesses and sinful enjoyments; not in the circle of his

riotous friends ; not amid the turmoil and distraction of the world. For in these circumstances there is generally no time for sober reflection. But "he came to himself" where there was no longer any opportunity to suppress the voice of conscience, but where he was alone with God. There the oft dismissed questions came : How have you lived ? how deep have you fallen ? what will become of you ? Hitherto he had been roaming through the world with his thoughts. The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life, were the things that rejoiced his soul. The joyous summer of his pleasures soon came to an end, and the winter of grief early blighted its promising blossoms. There he stood, shivering and naked upon the barren field, feeding swine and hungry.

"How many, many memories  
Swept over his spirit then."



His entire course *towards* and *in* the far country, was one of madness and of folly. He showed this in casting off the paternal yoke of wisdom and of love. And did he not also show it, by attempting to place his trust in his own experience? Did he not show that he was mad and foolish, by going into a far and strange country, without an object, without counsel, and instruction? Did he not show himself to be such, by squandering his property in a short time, and by becoming a companion, perhaps, of thieves, robbers, and murderers, and by being indifferent in regard to his circumstances, until his own destruction stared him in the face? These all were certain signs of his folly and madness. Sin is most certainly contrary to all sound reason, and all true wisdom.

Oh, what folly! to despise and re-

nounce God, in order to become one's own lord and master.

Oh, what folly! to suppress the divine powers of the soul, in order to serve sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Oh, what folly! to neglect the great object of life, and to forget, that we have a soul to win or to lose; that we were not only created for this world, but for God, for heaven, and for eternal life.

Oh, what folly! to be indifferent in regard to our true happiness, and to plunge ourselves into the deepest misery through this indifference.

Oh, what folly! to disregard entirely death, judgment, and eternity. All this the Prodigal Son did. But at length "he came to himself." He stood still in his career of sin, and began to reflect.

He now conversed with himself. Sad thoughts filled his heart, and tears of repentance flowed down his cheeks. He

now, for the first time, thought worthily of his home, which he had so shamefully despised; of his father, who so tenderly loved him; of his brother and sisters, who warned him of his danger, and of his ingratitude towards God and man; and he exclaims, at the awful abyss of his sinful life: "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger?" The eyes of him, who had slumbered and slept so long and so securely in sin, are now opened, so that he sees, and freely confesses his miserable condition: "I perish with hunger."

"Gleichwie des Hirsches mattes Herz,  
Noch frischem Wasser schreiet,  
So schreiet anch mein Seelenschmerz:  
Ach! dasz ich wär' befreiet  
Von meiner schweren Sündenpein."

He now remembers the table of his father's house, where they had bread and

water of life, and so often and so happily sung together :

“Ich komm jetzt als ein armer Gast,  
O Herr, Zu Deinem Tische,  
Den Du für mich bereitet hast,  
Dasz er mein Herz erfrische.  
Wenn mich der Seelen-Hunger nagt,  
Wenn mich der Durst des Geistes plagt,  
Bis ich den Schweisz abwische.”

But from all this glory he separated himself.

There is nothing that so causes the sinner to see his misery, as to compare himself with all things around and beneath him.

The Prodigal Son sees the many hired servants in his father's house, who have bread enough and to spare, and says : “ I perish with hunger.”

Who are these hired servants of God ?

1. They are the flowers and lilies of the field. “ Consider the lilies of the

field how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin ; and yet I say unto you, That Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ?”\*

2. The beasts of the field. These all live in peace, and attain the object and end of their creation. They are, in a certain sense, “hired servants” of God.

3. The birds of the air. Behold, how they assemble at the early dawn, to chant sweet notes of praise to their Creator, while we still rest upon our pillow. “Behold the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?”†

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\* Matthew 6 : 28-31.

† Ibid., 6 : 26.

“Sweet bird! thy bow’r is ever green,  
Thy sky is ever clear;  
Thou hast no sorrow in thy song,  
No winter in thy year.”

The sinner sees peace and joy everywhere; “but I,” he must say, “perish with hunger.”

“Ach, aus diesses Thales Gründen,  
Die der Kalte Nebel drückt,  
Könnst ich doch den Ausgang finden,  
Ach, wie fühlt ich mich beglückt!  
Dort erblick’ ich Schöne Hügel,  
Ewig jung und ewig grein!  
Hätt’ ich Schwingen, hätt’ ich Flügel,  
Nach den Hügel zög’ ich hin.”

4. But in a higher sense are men hired servants. Man sees many of his fellow-men, who, with little Christian culture, work rather in the spirit of servants than of sons, rather looking to their hire than to the spirit, which is active through love, and which makes them happy and joyful



in the fulfilment of their duties, and yet not without reward.

It is true, these may not have the highest joy of salvation, but they are much happier than he. They have, at least, bread enough and to spare ; while he is tormented with a fierce hunger, which is ever craving, but which can never be satisfied. It is a good sign, when the sinner stands still and begins to consider.

How many would have betaken themselves to some other citizen, who promised them a little hope and greater reward ! Or have thought, We will let it be so for a while, perhaps our condition will soon change ; perhaps more favorable circumstances will soon arise ; the famine will cease, the want will decrease, and we will find opportunity and means to elevate ourselves again to a condition of prosperity. Or it may be they learn to dress

their husks, so that they shall look like human food, and they then deny that they are the fodder of swine, and glorying in their shame (as many yet do); they deny that there is any difference between the food of men and of swine.

Men often perish, because they do not reflect, or because they wish to perish. Oh! my friend, have you never seen a hopeless sinner die; how he bewailed the first step of sin; how he saw the terrors of hell seizing hold of him; how he trembled and shook, and would not die, cursing the day of his birth, and going into eternity with the curse upon his lips? If not, you have not seen, what, alas! many a Christian minister is compelled to see. But the Prodigal Son acted otherwise; his reflection became for him the forerunner of repentance and reformation.

*2. His good Resolution.*

He resolved to repair, if possible, the evil he had done, and to return to his home ; for he said : “ I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.”

There are, in nature, turning-points to life, and turning-points to death. A turning-point to death occurs every autumn, when the sap withdraws in the trees and plants, from the trunk to the roots. The fresh life of trees then ceases to circulate. Their leaves begin to grow yellow and red. This change seems beautiful to children. But he who has knowledge of life and death, perceives in this change the color of sickness. It resembles the last flush that often appears upon the cheeks of the dying shortly before death. Another and a better turning-point occurs

in spring. The sap rises again into the trunk of the tree, and flows through all the branches and twigs. Strong buds break through the bark. They appear weak and gray at first, but they soon unfold, leaf by leaf, into the complete color of life.

As in nature, so also in human life there are turning-points to death and to life. We have seen in the life of the Prodigal Son one of these turning-points. It occurred when he said to his father: "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." We have seen, how from that time the juice of his life began to dry up. This turning-point occurs in human experience, when we depart from God and from Christ, when the life in us, which flows from the vine Christ, begins to dry up. It may be, that we may bring forth many good fruits even after this departure, but they have no life in them.

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They are nothing other than the last fading leaf of the tree, or the last flush on the cheek of the dying. The work of death has commenced, and it will continue to the sad end, unless a new turning-point to life occurs. But must this occur? Many a dead branch stands bare in spring. The others are decked in verdure, but one or more are naked and dead. Its twigs are bare; the storms, which cause the others to flourish and grow, snap off one twig after another. For it there is no turning-point to life. Thus also among men, there are thousands who remain so dead and dry, that they are not revived, the storms of divine judgment snap off one branch of their lives after another, until it is finally said of them: "As the tree falleth, so it lieth." Thus it is, but it is not God's fault. He gives times and seasons enough, which, by repentance and faith, should become

turning-points to life for us. Such a turning-point to life is now presented to us in the career of the Prodigal Son.

We may picture him to ourselves as having sat long upon the ground, reflecting upon his extreme misery, for man casts himself upon the earth in his utter desolateness, as Job did. "And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes;" and his friends who visited him "sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great."\*

The Prodigal Son did not reach this position without great sorrow, and we also do not arrive at it without like sorrow. No child is born without great pain. The new man in us is also not born without great pain.

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\* Job 2 : 8-13.



He, at last, like Augustine in the depths of his wicked wanderings, heard the low, sad echo of his youthful religious impressions, and gives utterance at last in noble strains, "Thou, God, hast created us for Thyself, and our hearts are without rest, until they rest in Thee."

And now, as the star of hope rises in his heart, he gathers up anew his broken energies, and says: "Why do I suffer hunger? Why sit I here among swine? Why do I serve the devil?" He springs up, as if snatched from death and hell, saying tenderly: "I will arise and go to my father."

This rising signifies the leaving of his former evil practices, and his evil companions; seeking refuge in prayer, hearing and reading Scripture, and meditating over his sad lot.

His language indicates, that this resolution was the result of deep conviction;

and he now determines, that he will no longer walk in the way of sin and of death. He is penitent and contrite—his mind is altogether changed. His eyes, which were formerly directed towards sin, are now turned towards the proper object—his father's house. The resolution is formed—"I will go home—go at once."

"I cannot rest, I may not sleep,  
No joy or peace I know ;  
My soul is torn with anguish deep,  
And fears a deeper woe.

"Then through this life of dangers  
I onward take my way ;  
But in this land of strangers  
I do not think to stay ;  
But onward on the road I fare  
That leads me to my home."

"Home ! sweet, sweet home."

How necessary and important is such a resolution ! For the want of it many

have remained wavering and undecided, until the door of grace, of hope, and of eternal life, has been closed forever.

Such a resolution, however, can only be formed through earnest prayer for divine aid and firm trust in divine grace. All confidence in ourselves must be utterly renounced.

Let no one imagine, that he can save himself from his misery, or that others can deliver him from the destruction of sin. No! for he who is himself a sinner can neither save himself nor others. God, and God alone can do it. Our Savior says: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."\* And "having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and

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\* John 6 : 44.

having a high-priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” \*

### 3. *He Voluntarily Confesses his Sins.*

The Prodigal Son proposes to say, when he returns: “Father, I have sinned!”—He will call him “Father,” even though he has sinned against him; for as the relation between him and his father was one which his obedience did not constitute, so his disobedience could not annul it.

But what is it that gives the Prodigal Son ground to believe, that his father will receive and not repel him? It is the covenant of baptism upon which he rests in hope. He was a *son*, was born a *son* of God at his baptism, and his calling of

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\* Heb. 10 : 19-22.

God is without repentance, or recall on his part.

We may illustrate this by our natural birth. We become sons or daughters of our earthly parents by being born flesh of their flesh, and bone of their bone. And once children, we remain such, however wicked our walk and conduct may be. If we are finally lost, we go to perdition as the children of our earthly parents.

Now, spiritually considered, we are all creatures, but not all children of God by nature; for "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost;"\* and no one can enter into the kingdom of God, except he is born again of the Holy Ghost. For Christ says: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."†

Regeneration is a work of God, which

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\* 1 Cor. 12 : 3.

† John 3 : 5.

He must perform for us, and to which we can contribute as little as to our natural birth.

This spiritual birth takes place when we consecrate in good faith our children, or ourselves as adults, to the triune God in holy baptism.\*

“I am baptized into Thy name,  
 O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost !  
 Among Thy seed a place I claim,  
 Among Thy consecrated host ;  
 Buried with Christ, and dead to sin,  
 Thy Spirit now shall live within.

“My loving Father, here dost Thou  
 Proclaim me as Thy child and heir ;  
 My faithful Savior biddest me now  
 The fruit of all Thy sorrows share ;  
 Thou, Holy Ghost, wilt comfort me,  
 When darkest clouds around I see.”

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\* Comp. Gen. 17 : 7. Mark 10 : 14-16. Acts  
 22 : 16 ; and 2 : 38, 39. Rom. 6 : 3, 4. Gal.  
 3 : 27. Col. 2 : 11, 12. Titus 3 : 5, etc. Eph.  
 5 : 26. 1 Pet. 3 : 21.



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Our spiritual birth, through the *Sacrament of Baptism*, is far superior to our natural birth. Here only vanishes the dark picture of human life, which fills us at every birth with so much fear and dread.

True, the child is unconscious of the act; it neither knows his parents upon earth, nor his Father in heaven; it also gives no thanks, shows no love, nor can it form any holy resolutions; even then it is called to be sanctified and blessed, by Him, who had once been a child and sanctified childhood. Holy prayers also are offered up, the Creed is repeated, and finally it is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The parents are standing prayerful around; with their eyes they are only conscious of water, but with the eye of faith they see the wonderful repetition of Jordan, where the

Son of God was baptized by John, and fulfilled all righteousness.

As a holy consecration fitted Christ for the great mission of Redemption, even so shall baptism sanctify and introduce us into the sphere of our heavenly calling. As then the voice from heaven spake, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," in baptism, therefore, we not only receive a name to bear on earth, but become spiritual children and heirs of the Saints in light. As the Holy Spirit came upon Christ, to consecrate Him for His mission, so is baptism a regeneration, and renewal of the Holy Ghost, and covenant with God.

In baptism we are implanted into Christ, received as children of God, and are anointed by the Holy Spirit, and we step into His innocence and righteousness.

Baptism is not only the birth of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost, but also the introduction into the bosom

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of the Christian Church, into the communion of Saints, that we may no longer stand alone, being surrounded by those of the household of faith, who care and provide for our wants, as children and heirs of heaven. Singular birth of regeneration! Festival of our childhood, first day of our life, thou day of sacred baptism! The day of our birth would, indeed, be a day of sorrowful remembrance through life, if it were not sanctified by the grace of God, into a day of spiritual regeneration. This spiritual, as well as our natural birth, can take place but once, and is fully illustrated in the Parable of the Leaven, which can be but once leaved.\*

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\* “In regard to man’s *conversion*, on the other hand, it is different. *Conversion* is that free and voluntary act of the penitent sinner, by which, with the help of divine grace, he renounces and turns from sin and unrighteousness, as being offensive to

If we have thus once become the children of God, then we remain so through all eternity; our sinful life also cannot separate us from this relation to God; and if we are finally lost, it will be as children, who were once consecrated to God.

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God, and engages to lead a holy life. In conversion, the awakened and penitent sinner reflects for himself upon his past course and present state, grieves for himself over his sins, prays for himself for the pardon of his iniquities, resolves for himself truly to forsake those iniquities and to lead a new life, and strives for himself to do all this. For all these exercises of his mind and heart, he is, of course, indebted to the Spirit of God, whose warnings, entreaties, and invitations, have graciously and powerfully constrained him to feel, and pray, and resolve, and strive as he does. But still these several acts are his own, self-conscious, personal acts. As in regeneration he is passive, so in conversion he is active." — Dr. Bomberger's *Infant Salvation*, pp. 32, 33. See also, Isaiah 55 : 1–7. Ezekiel 14 : 6; and 18 : 30–32. Matth. 3 : 2; and 4 : 17. Acts 8 : 22; and 26 : 30, 31. Rev. 2 : 5.

The recollection of his baptism is not to the baptized sinner as a menacing angel, keeping with a fiery sword the gates of that Paradise which he has forfeited, and to which he now vainly desires admission again ; but it is just in his baptism that he finds consolation and strength. Wretched and degraded though he be, he may yet take the dearest name of Father on his lips, and claim anew admission into the household of faith, on the ground that he was once a member thereof, and that his privileges abide for him still in their full force, although he had wasted much of his time in a foreign service. His confession is sincere and candid. He holds nothing back. Neither does he attempt to throw the blame upon another, as Adam did upon Eve,\* but he says : “ *I have sinned against heaven and before*

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\* Gen. 3 : 12.

thee." This is the language of sincere repentance.

He recognizes that he not merely sinned against man, but against heaven, or against God. He shows his repentance to have been wrought by God, a work of the Spirit, in that he acknowledges his sin in its root, as a transgression of the divine law, and as exceedingly sinful, being wrought against God. Thus David, when he exclaims, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned;"\* although his offences had been against his fellow-men. We may injure ourselves by our sin, we may wrong our neighbor, but strictly speaking, we can only *sin* against God; and the recognition of our evil as first and chiefly an offence against Him, is of the essence of all true repentance, and distinguishes it broadly from many other kinds of sorrow which may follow evil

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\* 2 Sam. 12 : 13.



deeds. When we come to give these words their higher application, the two acknowledgments, "*I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,*" merge into one, "I have sinned against thee, my Father in heaven." And the Lord, thy God, "Is not He thy father that hath bought thee? hath He not made thee, and established thee." \*

Not only here, but throughout all Scripture, this willingness to confess is ever noted as a sign of true repentance, even as the sinner's refusal to humble himself is the sure sign of a continued obstinacy. St. John says: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." † Augustine says:

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\* Deut. 32 : 6.

† 1 John 1 : 8, 9, 10.

“He shows himself worthy, in that he confesses himself unworthy.” With this deep feeling of unworthiness, he will confess that he has justly forfeited all which was once his, and that his course was a course of sin and shame. He will say: “I now see it, I feel it, I lament it. I abhor and condemn myself. With folly and wantonness I have done this evil against heaven and before thee, and I am no longer worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.”

“With deep repentance I’ll return  
And seek my father’s face;  
Unworthy to be call’d thy son,  
I’ll ask a servant’s place.”

He will now be satisfied with any place in his father’s house.

This is true confession, such as belongs to the essence of all true repentance. The words: “Make me as one of thy hired servants,” we will consider further on.

How deeply humble does he now feel !  
And thus must you, oh sinner ! humble  
yourself, if you would find favor with  
God. For there is nothing greater in the  
gifts of the Holy Spirit,—nothing more  
precious in the treasures of God,—nothing  
more holy among all the noble graces of  
the Christian life, than true humility.

To feel and to confess that you are not  
worthy to be called a son or daughter of  
God, — herein consists your worthiness.  
The Prodigal Son is willing to do a ser-  
vant's work, to live industrious and frugal,  
if he only may obtain forgiveness. "I  
had rather be a door-keeper in the house  
of my God, than to dwell in the tents of  
wickedness." \*

"Now I forbid my carnal hope,  
My fond desires recall ;  
I give my mortal interest up,  
And make my God my all."

This is the feeling of the sinner. When he recognizes his error, he would rather renounce everything, and be the lowest in his father's house—in the Church of Christ—than serve the devil any longer.

4. *How he carried out his Resolution.*

It is said: "He arose and came to his father." There is no tarrying now with him; what he has determined to do, he does at once, without delay. He does not postpone it to another time. His misery and his danger both urge him on; his home-sickness was so great, that he arises immediately to go home. The language of his soul was now:

"How oft, alas! this wretched heart  
Has wander'd from the Lord!  
How oft my roving thoughts depart,  
Forgetful of His word.

"Yet sov'reign mercy calls, 'Return:.'  
Dear Lord, and may I come!  
My vile ingratitude I mourn;  
Oh, take the wand'rer home!

“And canst Thou, wilt Thou yet forgive,  
And bid my crimes remove?  
And shall a pardon'd rebel live  
To speak Thy wondrous love?

“Almighty Grace, thy healing pow'r,  
How glorious, how divine!  
That can to life and bliss restore  
So vile a heart as mine.

“Thy pard'ning love, so free, so sweet,  
Dear Savior, I adore;  
Oh! keep me at Thy sacred feet,  
And let me rove no more.”

The resolution of repentance is often like the attempt to climb an iceberg. You place your foot forward only to find it slide back again. Ask yourself, how often you resolved to renounce some deeply rooted sin, lying, unfaithfulness, swearing, drinking, etc., and how miserably you failed in the attempt. It is only upon the shore of the new life, that we rightly experience how our strength was broken by the long service of sin. We then realize what St.

Paul means when he says: "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do."\* Did the Prodigal Son go to his lord, to take his leave? Then he must have tarried but a short time. And if you, oh sinner! would tear yourself away from your companions in sin, you must avoid a long leave-taking. When our blessed Savior was upon earth, calling upon men to follow him, one said unto him: "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."†

Many a poor sinner has been lost, because he has postponed his repentance from time to time. Men have often right

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\* Rom. 7 : 18, 19.

† Luke 9 : 61, 62.



views ; they are convicted, and resolve to return home ; but, alas ! there it ends, until it is said : “ The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” \* The Scriptures say : “ To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” “ Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”

5. *He perseveres in his Return.*

He goes towards home step by step with firm determination. Although he had wandered far away, still nothing is able to detain him, until he arrives in his father's house.

There is much that can prevent, and that does prevent, the penitent sinner from returning to God. How often do we see a morbid sensibility of shame, keep young people from Christ. They cannot

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\* Jer. 8 : 20.

bear the broad laugh, the sneer of contempt, the witty jest; nor endure the attack of the profane, the raillery of the impious. They blush, and conceal their secret attachment to God and His Church, as soon as it is assailed. Oh! my young friends, flee not when the enemy of your soul roars, much less surrender your salvation, when he only hisses at you in the skin of a fool. Be firm, and remember that God, the Church, truth, heaven, the Bible, conscience, salvation, saints, and angels, are all on your side, to strengthen and to support you at all times.

Look at your Redeemer, as He stands in the hall of Pilate, when He was made the object of every scorn and indignity; and will you shrink from a few sneers and scoffs for Him? Remember our Lord's most alarming language — "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation,

of him also shall the son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, and with the holy angels." But, if you are a Prodigal Son, permit nothing to keep you back. Remember, that only he who perseveres to the end, can be saved.

If, nevertheless, Satan, the world, and your own flesh and blood, would entice you, and keep you back, give them no heed, but cry out: "Eternal life, eternal life," that is my desire, my hope, my comfort, and my all.

"See where rebellious passions rage,  
And fierce desires and lusts engage;  
The meanest foe of all that train,  
Has thousands and ten thousands slain."

Happy change! The Prodigal now comes within the blessed reach of hope.

We have yet to consider the most beautiful part of this parable. The Prodigal Son is still on his way homeward,

and we will now soon see the blessed fruit of true repentance and sincere reformation.

He is now near to his father's house, but his mind is full of fear, his heart trembles, and there is an inward conflict between shame and sorrow, fear and hope.

The Savior describes the father as looking towards the country, whither the son had wandered. Without doubt, he often thought of and longed after his disobedient child.

#### 6. *The happy Meeting.*

The son thinks not of tarrying any longer. What he has determined to do, he does without delay, and he will soon prove how much larger are the riches of grace, which are laid up with his father, than he had dared to hope. For it is said: "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him."



**HIS RECEPTION BY HIS FATHER.**  
(See page 142.)





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“Far off he saw him slowly move,  
In pensive silence mourn;  
The father ran with arms of love,  
To welcome his return.”

This meeting contains many beautiful traits.

1. How often may not the father have gone out with a heavy and anxious heart to look for his son, hoping to see him return from the far country! How often may he not have wished and sighed: Oh! that my unfortunate son would hasten back again to my embrace! At length his eyes behold him, “when he was yet a great way off.” He sees him in his rags and misery; but he sees him return; he recognizes him as his disobedient, obstinate child, ragged and emaciated, but also as his beloved, long-lost son.

The evidences of the father’s love are described with a touching minuteness. He had often longed for and looked for

the return of his son. It is God, the gracious Father, who puts into the heart of the sinner even the first weak motions towards good, and He also listens to the first faint sighings of his penitent heart; and when he returns, He does not wait till he has come all the way, but

2. He hastens forward to meet him.

The father does not wear an aspect of severity, but one of loveliness, and at once welcomes him with a kiss. This kiss is not only an evidence of affection, but it was in the East also the pledge of reconciliation and peace.\*

Neither did the father conceal himself, nor wait until the penitent heart of his child had made its confession, but full of love he hastens towards him to encourage him to hope and rejoice.

How kind and condescending the father of the Prodigal Son!—It is thus the Lord

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\* Gen. 33 : 4.

hastens after erring sinners, and beseeches them to return to Him, that they may find life. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."\*

Thus God draws nigh unto them that draw nigh unto Him. Therefore "draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded."†

It was the father who put the first good thought into his mind, who also hears the first sigh of the sinner. "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear."‡ Yes, though they may be ever so far from Him.

"But when he was yet a great way off." Though there may be much of ignorance

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\* Isaiah 1 : 18. † James 4 : 8. ‡ Ps. 10 : 17.

in returning sinners still, far too slight a view of the evil of sin, or of the holiness of the God with whom they have to deal, He meets them, notwithstanding, with the evidences of His mercy and reconciled love.

This shows that the sinner is not made to go through a dreary apprenticeship of months' duration by God, as is done by the sects, but He at once embraces him in the arms of His love, and gives him at the first moment strong consolations, perhaps stronger and more abundant than afterwards, when he is settled in his Christian course. And this is necessary to assure him that he is accepted in Christ Jesus, and to convince him of that which it is so hard for the sinner to believe, that God has put away his sin, and is at peace with him. This is the great work, which is only possible to faith.

3. The father manifests a placable disposition towards his son.

When the father saw him, he “ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” He came towards him in the Prophets, who foretold the birth of the Savior; he also came towards the heathen in the dark presentiments which they had of a future glorious age, in which righteousness and peace would kiss each other on earth. But he fell upon the neck of all mankind in Christ, and in the hour when we, with all our righteousness, wisdom, beauty, art, wealth, and honor, fall at his feet and seek his grace in Christ, then he falls upon our neck and kisses us.

The father also makes the first movement towards reconciliation. He it is who gives the first good thought, in that He arouses the sinner by the influence of His Spirit, and leads him back to His father's house.

The heart of God the Father is always full of love and mercy. This is His nature,

for He is the God of love ; and it is also, at all times, His greatest pleasure to manifest this love towards the poor sinner ; not only to wait until he comes, but to hasten towards him, to embrace and kiss him. The father does not reproach him with his sins ; he does not say to him, as many fathers would, You have been a miserable wretch, or a godless child, having squandered all that I gave you, wickedly, and now having come home in filthy rags, no shoes to your feet, and almost starved with hunger ! be gone out of my doors ; *will I, think you,* receive such a vile person as you have been ? No, not a word of upbraiding is heard, in regard to his lewd course of life.

By this example of God, parents should learn to pass by great sins in their rebellious children, when they return penitent and humble ; and not show an irreconcilable spirit towards a prodigal child, though it should have spent all in a wicked



course of life, or even on harlots; yet they should forgive, and be kind, and win them back, with bountiful love and goodness.

This father of fathers does not even say, I forgive you, for he had already forgiven him; but the father, forgetting the past, receives him at once, and before he can make a confession, and it is only after he has been lovingly received that he makes

4. His confession, which he had resolved in his misery to make, and says: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." This confession must be made, as a duty we owe to God. For, by sinning, we have robbed God and His law of their divine honor; by confession, we establish it again.

"Now at last I end the strife,  
To my God I give my life

Wholly, with a steadfast mind ;  
Sin, I will not hearken more ;  
World, I turn from thee, 'tis o'er ;  
Not a look I'll cast behind.

“Hath my heart been wavering long ?  
Have I dallied oft with wrong ?  
Now at last I firmly say :  
All my will to this I give,  
Only to my God to live,  
And to serve Him night and day.

“Lord, I offer at Thy feet  
All I have most dear and sweet ;  
Lo ! I keep no secret hoard !  
Try my heart, and lurks there aught  
False within its inmost thought,  
Take it hence this moment, Lord !

“I will shun no toil or woe,  
Where Thou leadest I will go,  
Be my pathway plain or rough ;  
If but every hour may be  
Spent in work that pleases Thee,  
Ah, dear Lord, it is enough !

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“One thing will I seek alone,  
Nought without me shall be known,  
Sought, or toil'd for, more by me;  
Strange to earth and all her care,  
Well content with pilgrim's fare,  
Shall my life be hid in Thee.

“Thee I make my choice alone,  
Make for ever, Lord, Thine own,  
All my powers of soul and mind;  
Yes, I give myself away,  
Let the covenant stand for aye  
That my hand to-day hath signed.”

This is the proper course for a penitent sinner; for though God forgives, man must not, therefore, forget to be thankful. This confession was made after, and not before, the kiss of reconciliation; for the more the sinner knows and tastes of the love of God, the more he grieves ever to have sinned against that love. It is under the genial rays of this paternal love, that the frozen heart begins to thaw and to melt, and the tears of repentance to flow.

The knowledge of God's love in Christ is the salt, which alone can turn the bitter and barren-making streams of remorse into the healing waters of repentance.

Hence we see, that true repentance follows, and does not precede divine forgiveness; and thus too will repentance be a thing of the whole life long, for every new insight into that forgiving love of God, is as a new reason why we should mourn that we ever sinned against it.

How beautifully does this parable exhibit the difference between the Church of God, — the kingdom of Christ, — and the sect spirit! This spirit teaches, that as soon as the sinner has obtained forgiveness, he may lay aside the work of repentance, at least until he becomes unconverted again; and therefore it also often affirms, the longer men can be kept in suspense concerning their forgiveness,

the better, as in this way a deeper foundation of repentance will be laid.

This is surely a wrong view of the relation in which true repentance and forgiveness stand to each other; their true relation is rather revealed to us in such passages as Ezek. 36 : 31, when the Lord says: "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations;" and what the Lord means by these words, He gives us to understand, ver. 24-30: Then *after* I have cleansed you, — after I have given you a new heart, and all my richest blessings, then "shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations." Compare also Ezek. 16 : 60-63, where the Lord declares: "Neverthe-

less, I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed," &c.

Although the younger son has the evidence that his father is pacified towards him, he, nevertheless, confesses his sins. He does not, indeed, say all that he had once intended,—he does not say : “ Make me as one of thy hired servants;” for this, undoubtedly, was the heaviest burden of his repentance. Yet, why should he now ask to be made a hired servant, since his father was willing to receive him as a son? Why should the son, who only prayed for a little, refuse to receive much, if the father was willing to bless him so abundantly? This is an evidence that the grace which he has already received, he has not received in vain. “ For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation



not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

### 7. *The Hearty Reception.*

We have seen the Prodigal Son in the arms of his father, but now he is led into the house by his father's hand, and here the numerous treasures laid up for him by the father are shown to him. But it is to be well observed, that he did not receive these treasures *outside of*, but *within* the house.

Augustine says: "That under God the Father, we are children in the mother, the Catholic Church, and fellow-citizens in the heavenly Jerusalem."

It would be no more reasonable to presume that any one independent or outside of the Church, could be a good and holy man, than to suppose that the Mississippi might roll on its flood of waters to the ocean, though all its tributary

streams were cut off, and it were replenished only by occasional drops from the clouds.

The house here signifies the Church of God, "which is the body of Christ, the fulness of him that filleth all in all," where the polluted soul is cleansed through the believing use of the means of grace.

"God in His earthly temple lays  
Foundation for His heav'nly praise;  
He likes the tents of Jacob well,  
But still in Zion loves to dwell.

"His mercy visits ev'ry house,  
That pays its night and morning vows,  
But makes a more delightful stay,  
Where churches meet to praise and pray."

Here it is that believers hold the sweetest fellowship with heaven, and that the delightful communion of saints is most fully realized.

In the house took place

1. The change of clothing.

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His soiled and torn garments are exchanged for those of the family, and hereby the father declares that he intends again to give him a name and a place in his house ; for he “ said unto his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.”

These are all ornaments, not of the slave, but of the free ; all, therefore, declaring his restoration to his former dignity, and his lost privileges.

The best robe is brought ; the best that was in the house, or the robe which he formerly wore when he walked a son in his father’s house, and which had been kept for him, and was now to be restored. That is, the righteousness of Christ is now again imputed to him, and the sanctity of his soul is restored, by being introduced again into his baptismal privileges, so that he can pray.

“The Savior’s blood and righteousness  
My beauty is, my glorious dress;  
Thus well array’d, I need not fear,  
When in His presence I appear.”

But who are meant by the servants? They are the ministers of the gospel, and the officers of the Church, especially the ministers, who are appointed of God to administer the means of grace in “the house” — His Church. Occupying this position in His Church, it is impossible for ministers to perform their sacred duties, unless they have hearts deeply imbued with the love of Christ.

The office of the ministry is of such a character, that it requires great self-denial, zeal, faith, and love.

In regard to elders, none ought to be elected to this office who are not cordially devoted to the service of God. It is a grievous offence to God, and an injury to the Church, when this office is entrusted

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to men who are characterized by levity ; especially when the object of so doing is to secure some earthly interest.

Deacons also should be exemplary in faith and in practice, that the congregation may be edified by their example. On this account light-minded men ought not to seek, nor be appointed to this office.

That deep devotion and earnest piety should characterize such as occupy sacred offices in the Church, is most necessary and reasonable. None other certainly can stand properly as God's functionaries — organs of the divine — the representatives of the Spirit of Christ and of his Church.

Such undoubtedly were those servants who brought the best robe, and such ought all Church officers to be, particularly *ministers*.

“Ye servants of the Lord,  
Each in his office wait,  
Observant of His heav’nly word,  
And watchful at His gate.”

But let no one think that a minister is a servant of men, and that he must preach simply to please men having “itching ears.” No! he is a servant of the Most High God, who, if true to his calling, will hear said to him: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.”\*

We can easily imagine that the servants first removed the tattered garments, the poor swine-herd’s rags, which were hanging about him. This is confirmed by a similar course of procedure, where it is said: “Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold I have caused thine iniquity to

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\* Matth. 25 : 21.



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pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." \*

This bringing out of the best robe, and putting it upon him, especially signifies that act of God, which is a release from condemnation, and also an imputation of the merits and righteousness of Christ.

In this sense the prophet says: "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." †

2. A ring is put on his hand.

The ring was used among the ancients as a badge of honor, as none but noble persons were permitted to wear it. "If there come into your assemblies a man with a gold ring, you say to him, Sit thou in a good place," &c.

Among the Romans it was a token of freedom, for neither bondmen nor stran-

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\* Zech. 3 : 4.

† Isaiah 61 : 3.

gers were allowed to wear it, but only such as were free-born, or purchased their liberty; and this may have been the case among the Egyptians, for Joseph was a prisoner when Pharaoh sent for him; and this giving of the ring to him may not only signify that he was the most honorable person in the kingdom, even next to the king himself, but also be a pledge of his liberty and citizenship, as a freeman in the land.

This ring is the sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit, with which the Prodigal Son was adorned. The ring was often also a seal, to assure the possessor that the Spirit of God sealed to him a much larger inheritance in the future, which, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, was not to be altered. For "the Spirit beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God."

The ring, too, is often the pledge of

betrothal. "And I will betroth thee unto me forever : yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies, and I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness ; and thou shalt know the Lord."\* This ring was put upon the Prodigal as an emblem of his soul's espousals with Christ.

A ring is also an emblem of eternity,—it has no end ; so all spiritual privileges and freedom are eternal.

3. Shoes are also put on his feet, which was not the case with servants and slaves, and which shows that he was received as a son, and not as a hired servant.

Shoes were also an ornament to the feet, and denote a willingness and a fitness to travel through any difficult, stony, or thorny paths, where such as are barefooted dare not venture ; thus the resolu-

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\* Hosea 2 : 19, 20.

tion of the will, and spirituality of the affections, helps a Christian to venture through all difficulties in God's ways. A man that wants courage, zeal, and resolution, is afraid to venture through the thorns and briers of the flesh, temptation of Satan, the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches.

Shoes, too, may represent a mortified disposition to the world ; for as shoes keep the feet at a distance from the earth, so the believer tramples upon all sinful pleasures, riches, and honors of this evil world ; and as shoes strengthen the feet, so hereby the feet of the soul are strengthened.

The Prodigal will now have a different walking. He is now going in a heavenly and spiritual course of life ; before, he was carnally-minded, but now he is spiritually-minded ; before, he was bent on things below, but now are his "affections set on

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things above;" before, his feet probably carried him to the "tents of wickedness," but now into the courts of God's house.

These shoes keep the feet of our soul in an upright course of life before God, because of the difficulty of the way in which we are to walk, and prevent us from either falling or sliding, and of being wounded in our souls. Many who lack these shoes have been wounded to death, through the deceitfulness of sin.

The penitent shall be equipped for holy obedience; therefore, Paul says, "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." \*

Not the least strength shall be wanting to him. Everything necessary is given; and after this has taken place, then comes the time for rejoicing.

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\* Eph. 6 : 15.

8. *The Feast of Joy.*

The Prodigal Son returns fatigued and exhausted by the journey from the far country, whither he had wandered, and emaciated for want of proper food. Hence his father says to the servants: "Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry." That is to say: Set before him the choicest provision of my house; he shall eat the fat, the most delicious food; the very best that I have shall not be withheld from him; he shall eat that which is "meat indeed, and drink that which is drink indeed."

1. We remark, that the joys of the gospel are often compared to a feast. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son," \* &c.

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\* Matth. 22 : 2-14.



This is a great feast, and also richly provided with spiritual nourishment. Although the feast in this parable may have reference to the Lord's Supper, to which the Prodigal Son now comes, yet the chief reference is, without doubt, to the festal joy and rejoicing which is in heaven at the sinner's return, and no less in the Church on earth, and in his own heart also. "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." And "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." \*

"Thro' all the courts the tidings flew,  
And spread the joy around —  
The angels tuned their harps anew,  
The Prodigal is found!"

2. The guests are numerous. — The

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\* Luke 15 : 7, 10.

father calls his servants together, to participate in his joy. The news of the return of the Prodigal Son spreads rapidly.

In the preceding parables, the shepherd summons his friends, after he had again found his sheep which had wandered into the wilderness, and said unto them: "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." \*

And the woman called her friends and neighbors, after she had found the piece of silver, and said unto them: "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." †

So in this parable, the father summons his servants to rejoice with him in his joy.

It is the nature of joy, that it desires to impart itself to others. And if this be true of earthly joy, how much more of the yet holier joy of heaven!

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\* Luke 15 : 6.

† Luke 15 : 9.

After the father had called the guests together, he declares to them

3. *The ground of this joy*, in which they were invited to share. In an earthly household, as also in the Church, we might naturally conclude some to have made part of the household now, who had not made part at the time of the Prodigal Son's departure. It was, therefore, necessary to declare to them that this wanderer, this beggar, was no other than a son of the house, whom they should henceforth regard as such.

The father solemnly reinstated him, before them all, in all the honors of the family. That is, he is again received as a member of the Church of Christ, from which he had separated himself by his sins.

"This, my son," he says — and, comparing the present with the past — "was dead, and is alive again." "Dead!" for

the state of sin is ever considered in Scripture as a state of death. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”\*

This spiritual death consists in a sinful separation from God, which soon extinguishes the light of the soul; like a candle that is blown out, the candle remains, but the light is gone; or, like a tree that is dead, the body and arms remain, but the life is gone, its leaves are fallen off, its branches withered and dead. Even thus it is with all sinners, — they are without the principle of divine life in their souls—*they are dead.*

A dead man’s beauty is gone, and his countenance is changed; so the spiritual beauty of a sinner is gone, by reason of sin. Virtue puts beauty and glory on the

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\* 1 John 3 : 14.

soul, but sin mars this beautiful image of God.

Dead men also are cold as ice; even so sinners without a principle of true spiritual life are cold to spiritual and heavenly things; they are without motion; they breathe not. So unregenerated persons pray not. This is the soul's moving—its spiritual breath—its arm to move the universe.

Dead men, too, speak not; they cannot praise and magnify God. Even so, men dead in trespass and sin cannot bring God honor, nor sing to His praise—

“Lord, how delightful 't is to see  
A whole assembly worship Thee;  
At once they sing, at once they pray;  
They hear of heaven, and learn the way.”

While dead, they neither hear, feel, see, taste, nor smell; they have lost all the spiritual senses of the soul; though guilt, like a mountain, lies upon them, they feel

it not; they are also loathsome in the sight of God, and all gracious persons; and all their brave ornaments and odors are but the perfuming of a dead corpse. Moreover, a dead man is not fit to remain above ground, but to be buried; so wicked men will eventually be buried in the gulf of despair.

The father says further: "He was lost, and is found." The Apostle Peter says: "Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your souls." \*

To be lost is to have strayed away from God our Creator, and from Christ our Redeemer; while thus lost we are undone. We say of a man that falls into the sea, who is left without help, or of a man condemned to die, without hope of pardon, he is a lost and dead man.

In the first place, we have all lost God,

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\* 1 Pet. 2 : 25.



and Paradise, with all that we possessed in our creation ; secondly, we have lost, as prodigals, all the blessings and advantages that we had under the Jewish dispensation ; thirdly, we have lost, as prodigals, all the greater and higher privileges and blessings of the Christian Church.

While thus the lost was found, and the dead alive, “they began to be merry.” The father rejoiced ; the Prodigal Son rejoiced ; the servants rejoiced ; angels in heaven rejoiced ; they all rejoiced together, because the lost was found, and the dead alive.

Now the Prodigal can sing :

“ Now I have found the ground wherein  
Sure my soul’s anchor may remain ;  
Ev’n Christ, who to atone for sin  
Was as a spotless victim slain ;  
Whose mercy shall unshaken stay,  
When heaven and earth shall flee away.

“O Lord, Thy everlasting grace  
Our scanty thought surpasseth far;  
Thy bosom yearns with tenderness,  
Thy arms of love still open are;  
'Thy heart o'er sinners can't but break,  
Whether Thy grace they slight or take.

“Fixed on this ground will I remain,  
Tho' my heart fail and flesh decay;  
This anchor shall my soul sustain  
When earth's foundations melt away:  
Mercy's full power I then shall prove,  
Lov'd with an everlasting love.”

While the Prodigal is thus absorbed in his joyful song, it breaks forth in the spirit world:

“Hark! what mean those heav'nly voices,  
Sweetly sounding through the skies:  
Lo! th' angelic host rejoices,  
Heav'nly hallelujahs rise.

“Listen to the wondrous story  
Which they chant in hymns of joy;  
Glory in the highest, glory!  
Glory be to God most high!

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“Peace on earth, good will from heav’n,  
Reaching far as man is found;  
Souls redeem’d and sins forgiven,  
Loud our golden harps shall sound.”

Not only does the Prodigal and angels  
rejoice, but also all Christendom :

Saints of God on earth abiding,  
Teachers, Parents, here below,  
Who shall hear the joyful tiding,  
Feel of joy the warmest glow.\*

All at last for joy shout :

Therefore let us all united,  
Love the Lord our Savior God !  
Steadfast in our faith abiding,  
Though the earth shall be subsiding,  
Eternal shall our faith the same,  
For ever true to Him remain ;  
Let’s love the Lord, forever more  
He’ll lead us to the heav’nly shore.\*

It was not strange, that the song of

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\* Translated from the German.

joy was heard afar off. If the finding of a lost piece of money, and the recovery of a lost sheep, caused great joy, how much greater must be caused by the restoration of an immortal soul! What joy should not the restoration of a lost sinner on earth awaken, when even the angels of God rejoice over it!

4. Here, however, a question arises, which claims an answer. Everywhere in the gospel, Christ is represented as the only ground of our salvation, and of our happiness. There is salvation in no other than Christ; there is none other name given among men, whereby we must be saved. The condition of such salvation is also faith in Christ, and in His holy merits; and no one can come to the Father but through Him.

But how does it now happen, that nothing at all is said in this parable about Christ and His salvation? No mention at all is made of a mediator and inter-

cessor, of a Savior and Reconciler. Whom does the Lord describe in the parable under the image of a loving father, as previously under the image of a shepherd? No other than Himself. It was not necessary to mention a Mediator and Savior, for it is the Mediator Himself, who describes Himself according to His pardoning love; who here in a striking parable confirms what the scribes and Pharisees held as an objection to Him, namely, that He received sinners.

Sinner! may not this make you willing to return home, with the Prodigal? Is not the entertainment promised to you in the kingdom of God, inviting to you? Do you not yet believe that there is that to be found in God and Christ Jesus, which you never find anywhere else? Do you not yet wish to be united again to Christ, and have the door, on the way to eternal happiness, opened to your never-dying soul? If all this representation

has no effect upon you, we ask you not to speak evil of those that have willingly denied themselves, and forsaken all to follow Jesus; nor of those things which you know not, and understand not; for remember that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit, neither can he know them." Happy, thrice happy, eternally happy, are those that can say: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Here this parable, like the two preceding, might have ended. But the Lord speaks in the eleventh verse of two sons, and He has promised something more. A new beauty is derived from the contrast which is brought out between the large heart of God and the narrow grudging heart of man, on which account we will now proceed to consider the elder son and his conduct.



## IV.

## THE CONDUCT OF THE ELDER SON.

1. *His return from the Field.*

“Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.” While the house is ringing with festal rejoicing, he returns from the field, where, no doubt, he had been, as usual, engaged in labor. At least so much is implied in the words, and this intimation is not given us without good reason. For while the other son had been wasting time, and means, and strength, and his whole inheritance, in idleness and sinful pleasures abroad, *he* had been engaged at home, on

his father's ground, in pursuit of useful industry.

This, however, is no justification, but an explanation of the complaint which he thinks himself warranted to make.

This is, without doubt, a picture of the Jews in general, who hated the heathen in their hearts; but more especially of the envy of the Pharisees, because He received publicans and sinners, "and even ate with them."

As he "drew nigh to the house, he heard singing and dancing."—Here we observe that, according to the customs of the East, the guests were mere listeners and spectators—the singers and the dancers being hired for the occasion, as was the case also at funerals. "They shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing."\* He was surprised at these

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\* Amos 5 : 16.

unexpected and unaccustomed sounds in the house. This already, that such a thing should take place in the house without his knowledge, offends him, and, with an astonishment that betrays dislike, “he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.”

What subtle self-righteousness is indicated in his mode of procedure! He does not go in; he does not believe that when his father makes a feast, he has reason to be merry. And although he had already determined to disapprove what was going forward, he still remains without; and, instead of himself asking his father, he calls one of the servants, to learn from him the cause of the joy, or, as he says, “what these things meant,” — and demands an explanation, as if they required it. “And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him

safe and sound." The servant confines himself to the external features of the case; he only reports that he came back safe and sound, and that his father had killed the fatted calf. Instead of being joyful and glad in his heart, he is displeased; instead of embracing his brother, and greeting him with a fraternal kiss, he "would not go in."

The joy of the father, however, is deep, that he has now again recovered his son; him, who was once dead, but who is now alive; him, who was once lost to him and to God, now again found by both at the same time. And the tidings that his father had received his brother safe and sound, that he had fortunately returned, and that his father rejoiced on this account, moved him to displeasure instead of joy. "He was angry, and would not go in."

What aroused his displeasure? Had

injustice been done him? Had he been offended or wronged? Did the return of his brother, or the reception that he met with from the father, inflict shame or injury upon him? Nothing of the kind. Perhaps he thought he ought to have first consulted him, and have permitted him to prescribe his conduct towards the Prodigal Son.

But perhaps the father erred. He manifested mildness and caution, when he should have been strict and severe. He forgave, where he ought to have punished. He received the son with forgiving love, whom he ought to have rejected with displeasure, especially as he himself declared that he was not worthy to be called his son. But what is all this, but to say, that God has no right to save sinners in this way. Or that He must learn from us the method according to which He should receive sinners.

2. *He acts wickedly and without Feeling.*

He should have rejoiced over his brother, over his *younger* brother; instead of which he would neither acknowledge nor receive him, neither show mercy nor forgiveness. "His father came out, and entreated him." For the sake of the elder son the father left the festive board for a moment. Nevertheless, he would not lay aside his displeasure, but began loudly to complain of unfair treatment and of the bounty which was bestowed upon his brother's misconduct, and invidiously compares the father's conduct with his brother's extravagance. "But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots," &c. He tears off the veil that had been cast over his sinful life. He says not, my brother, but thy son — thy wicked son, — for *him* you have killed the fatted calf!

The hearts of some people greatly de-





BEHAVIOR OF THE ELDER SON.

(See page 184.)



light, if they can find an opportunity to lay bare the faults of others. Not so with the Prodigal's father; he would have willingly passed over all his crimes, without so much as referring to them, but the vain-glorious, self-righteous brother must lift the veil that had been cast over his sinful life. Thus you will ever find the self-righteous among the people of God, constantly watching for opportunities to expose the erring, instead of hiding, as they should do, their sins, and assisting them in their recovery. And says one: "It is an easy thing to find fault, and to open the wounds of the Church to the gaze of the world. There are those who find it much easier to whisper the defects of the Church to the wicked, than to cover them by the mantle of charity. There are those who find it more pleasant to publish the weaknesses of the Church

upon the house-tops, than to weep over them in silence and in secret."

"There are persons found standing in the Church as members, who resemble those birds which soar and wing their way over all the beauties of a landscape, admiring no lovely tree, no fragrant flower, no graceful stream, no golden field, but eagerly light at last to gloat upon a horrid carcass! So there are men who pass over a thousand things in the Church which they might praise to others, to feed their morbid spirits on some weakness and blemish. Like the dragon-fly, they love sores, and on them will they feed!" The Psalmist says: "I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me."\*

"Give me the heart that fain would hide —

Would fain another's fault efface;

How can it pleasure human pride

To prove humanity but base?

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\* Harbaugh's Golden Censer, p. 358.

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No : let us reach a higher mood,  
A nobler estimate of man ;  
Be earnest in the search of good,  
And speak of all the best we can."

"Thou never gavest me a kid." By this he would say, To me, who have served you so faithfully, you have never even given a kid, that I might rejoice. But thy son, who has squandered thy goods sinfully and shamefully, and who has returned after many years of disobedience, *he* is at once restored to his former position in the house, to him shall be given the best also that *yet* remains in the house !

He no longer recognizes him as his brother, but speaks of him as of a stranger. For him you have not only killed a kid, but the choicest calf in the stall. What would he have said, if he had known all, and seen him arrayed in the best robe, and with all his other ornaments ?

If we ask what is meant by the father's



bidding him, or to whom is the father's request addressed? the answer is, To the sinner; and since we all are sinners, to us all without a single exception. Yes, it is addressed to you, ye proud and self-righteous ones, who in unbelief find fault with the arrangements of your God, who despise His grace, and refuse to submit in humility to His divine counsels for your happiness, who are not willing to accept the terms which His wisdom and love have devised for the salvation of lost sinners. There where the voice of joy resounds over the recovered son, the father beseeches you, in infinite love, be reconciled with God!

It is addressed to you, ye deluded souls, who through pride and vanity, through avarice and covetousness, through enmity and hatred, through excess of sensuality and lust, through shame and disgrace, frivolously dissolved your union with



God, and find your heaven in the vile service of the world and of sin. The father beseeches you most earnestly, Return, ye apostate children, I will heal your backsliding.

It is addressed to you, when your conscience warns you against sin, when it convicts of sin and punishes you, because you have been guilty of wrong-doing; is this anything other than a request of your heavenly father? When the ambassadors in Christ's stead preach the words of eternal life, which His only begotten Son once proclaimed, then His love addresses you, to win you from death to life.

He calls you, when you stand comfortless at the graves of your beloved ones. As you look down into its gloom, which will soon hide from you all that you prize on earth, must you not confess, as your eyes overflow with tears, and your tongue

gives utterance to sad complaints, or is silenced by pain, that your God is speaking to you, that your father is speaking to your wounded heart? Yes, He beseeches us when He gives, when He takes, when He blesses, and when He afflicts.

He beseeches also when He sends sickness into your family, or when He visits you, and lays you on a sick bed, through a divine chastisement.

He calls you at this moment by this voice of His word; He calls us all, large and small, rich and poor, high and low, old and young, He calls us most earnestly and affectionately, and perhaps, at this moment, for the last time.

“Who knows how near my end may be?

Time speeds away, and Death comes on;  
How swiftly, ah! how suddenly

May Death be here, and life be gone!  
My God, for Jesus' sake, I pray  
Thy peace may bless my dying day.

“The world that smiled when morn was come,  
May change for me ere close of eve;  
So long as earth is still my home,  
In peril of my death I live;  
My God, for Jesus’ sake, I pray  
Thy peace may bless my dying day.”

3. *The Father does not permit his Joy to be  
disturbed.*

It is too joyful an occasion for the father to be disturbed by the complaints and temper of the elder son. There shall not be, if he can help it, a cloud upon any brow, and instead of answering him with severity, he expostulates with him, and seeks to convince him of the unreasonableness of his complaint.

“Speak kindly to the erring !  
Thou yet may lead them back,  
With holy words and tones of love,  
From misery’s thorny track ;

“Forget not thou hast often sinned,  
And sinful yet must be —  
Deal gently with the erring one,  
As God hath dealt with thee.”

Nor does the father fail to warn him that he is now falling into the very sin of his brother, when he said: “Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.”

The elder soon feels as though he did not truly possess what he possessed with his father, but that he must separate, and divide it from his father's stock, before he could truly call it his own. Accordingly he truly had just as little love for the father, as the younger son had when he left his father's house. The father's answer is a warning against this evil, which lay at the root of the elder brother's conduct, namely, an *unloving* and *unthankful spirit*, which manifested itself only more plainly in the younger brother, and most plainly in the wicked husband-

men, who said: "This is the heir; let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours."

The entire speech of the elder brother is a reproach against the father. — "You show greater favor towards your favorite, whom you have spoiled and pampered, than towards me." The father answers mildly: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." He makes him see his unloving spirit out of which his discontent proceeded. "Thou didst never separate thyself from me, and didst continually participate in the joy of my house; grudge not thy brother a joy, of which he has been so long a time deprived."

He says not, this my son, as the brother's ungraciousness would have it, but: "Thou shouldest make merry and be glad, *for this thy brother* was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found."

*This thy brother*, thy kindred, to whom thou owest love and kindness. Thou shouldest, therefore, rejoice to have thy brother again. He was also dead to thee; also was lost to thee; he is also alive again for thee; has also been found again for thee; yea, for me and for thee. Truly a powerful exhortation to brotherly love, which we owe to each other, as men, and especially as Christians.

What influence the father's words had upon the elder son, we are not told.

#### 4. *The Elder Son and his Self-righteousness.*

1. The elder son represents one who has been restrained from flagrant sins and vices by the law; who has been occupied, though in a slavish spirit, in the works of the law. No doubt, reference is had here to many of the Pharisees; many of them were hypocrites; but also many



were earnest. Nevertheless, in much blindness of heart they followed after a righteousness which was in fact nothing else than pure self-righteousness. This righteousness was superficial in its character, for they only endeavored to fulfil the letter of the law, and did not attain to any such deep knowledge of the corruption of their own hearts, as would render them mild and merciful to others, and humble them before God.

Such murmurers may be here meant; persons not utterly to be rejected, nor the good in them to be utterly denied, but who need rather to be shown the faultiness, imperfection, narrowness, and lovelessness of their religion. They are to be invited to renounce their servile spiritual service, and to enter into the glorious freedom of the children of God, which Christ has secured for us.

In this sense we must understand the

that what was given to his brother was taken from him ; but in the free kingdom of love, of the grace of God, one has not less because the other has more, but all is possessed by each. Thus, for example, each says, My Church, and rightly ; and yet each one does not possess it for himself alone, nor can he separate a part of it for his own special use ; but it belongs equally to the whole congregation. The way to God's worship is free and open to all ; all can hear, sing, pray, and be blessed, and, therefore, no member has less because another has more. Thus it is also in the kingdom of the love and grace of God. The fountain of divine grace is not a little scanty spring, but an inexhaustible stream, on whose banks all may stand and draw, and none need suffer thirst because others drink.

To each of His true servants and children the Lord says, as the father did to

his elder son : “ All that I have is thine.” If any then is in want, and thinks that he has not enough, he is in want, as is the elder son here, not in God, but in his own narrow, grudging heart.

What effect the father’s words produced upon the elder son, is not related, because it was also yet uncertain whether the scribes and the Pharisees might not also be won to repentance, which was as much needed by them as by the publicans and harlots.

The Lord also does not say that he refused to the last to come in, or that he was finally excluded ; but He only gives us a hint, that as yet the kingdom of God was not closed against the Pharisees ; and that they too, as well as the sinners, were invited to abandon their low, poor, and formal righteousness, and to enter into the glorious liberty of the kingdom of Christ. “ Even so we, when we were children,

were in bondage under the elements of the world; but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”\* Therefore they were invited to be present at that spiritual festival, where the shadows of the old covenant were changed into the realities of the new covenant in Christ.

It is true, but few of the Jews believed on Christ, and dreadful was the judgment of God, which was visited upon them on this account, in the destruction of Jerusalem. A few only came with the Gentile world to the great festival of reconciliation. Had the Gentiles been sent for a time into “the field,” that is, had they been placed under the law, it would have been quite different; but that they should be brought at once from the service of

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\* Gal. 4 : 3-5.

sin into the festival of reconciliation,—this was more than the Jews could bear.

Others, who were mistaken, looked in upon this festival of reconciliation, that is, of the gospel; or, like the Ebionites, pretended to go in, but as soon as they discovered that they met together with those who were formerly Gentiles, presently withdrew themselves again.

We, who are of Gentile descent, must not forget that the whole matter has been reversed, and that we are in danger of acting like the elder son. For the time is coming, when the Jews, who are now without, who are now feeding upon husks far away from their Father's house, will acknowledge Christ and come joyfully to the festival of the gospel, when we shall be in danger of falling into the sin of the elder brother, through our own narrow righteousness.

Wherefore we have given us here



5. *An Earnest Warning against Self-righteousness.*

The man who is restrained from external vices by the law, is disposed to think himself to be better than other men, and easily glorifies himself, as the elder son, saying: "Lo! these many years do I serve thee; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." What blindness,—what pride! And yet, how many men are there not, at the present day, who glory in their honesty, and in their civil rectitude, but know nothing of the spirit of love!

A Rabbi says: "If there are only three righteous persons in the world, they are myself and my two sons; if only two, myself and my oldest son; if only one, myself."

Thus do self-righteous Christians also think and speak. No one can speak evil



of us ; we have not murdered ; we do not steal, nor rob, nor deceive ; we do not lead dissolute lives ; we are industrious ; we care for those of our own household ; we give to every one his due ; we go to Church, we pray, we give alms, &c. And many go contented into eternity in such great blindness.

“Lo ! these many years do I serve thee ; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment.”

Who of us can honestly and truly say this ? The best man on earth is defective and imperfect, and has nothing to glory in but his own weakness. Paul says : “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect ; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are be-

hind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” \*    And in reference to the woman taken in adultery, Christ says: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” †

There are also some among the various Christian denominations, who are full of the spirit of the elder son ; who still entertain the thought, that they are much better than all other Christians. We would only remind these of the Pharisee, who went up to the temple to pray, and thanked God that he was not “as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” ‡

He imagined, because he had avoided gross outbreaks of vice, that he lacked

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\* Philippians 3 : 12-15.

† John 8 : 7.

‡ Luke 18 : 11, 12.

nothing. Whilst the publican felt and confessed his burden of sin, and went justified to his house, the Pharisee lacked all feeling of sin, all love, as well as all humility.

Such persons do not pray for the pardon of their sins, nor yet for grace; neither did Christ come into the world for such, but He came to seek the lost, to save *sinner*s, as He Himself says: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Wherefore He warned the Pharisees, and solemnly declared: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

In like manner He also warns us against narrow self-righteousness, which has no worth before God. Let us take our places, therefore, among penitent sinners, and pray to God that He may preserve us in

the faith, and that Christ may be and remain our righteousness, ever remembering that

“Pray’r is the soul’s sincere desire,  
Utter’d or unexpress’d;  
The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast.

“Pray’r is the burden of a sigh,  
The falling of a tear;  
The upward glancing of an eye,  
When none but God is near.

“Pray’r is the simplest form of speech  
That infant lips can try;  
Pray’r is the sublimest strains that reach  
The majesty on high.

“Pray’r is the Christian’s vital breath,  
The Christian’s native air,  
His watchword at the gate of death—  
He enters heav’n with pray’r.

“Pray’r is the contrite sinner’s voice  
Returning from his ways,  
While angels in their songs rejoice,  
And cry, “Behold, he prays.”

But some one may say : “ Why should I despair ? The thief on the cross was saved at the last hour.” Ah ! in that narrative of sacred history there is something most alarming. That record was made, that none might despair, and but one such is found in the Bible, that none may dare presume. The husbandman, in autumn and winter, will in vain implore the Almighty to grant him a crop, after he has foolishly squandered and slept away his seed-time and summer, and planted and cultivated not his grounds. Or you may say : “ There are not many, but only a few who have so deeply fallen into sin.” This may be true, but all *can* fall so deeply, and sin so much and so greatly.

All misery and sin is possible from the first departure from God ; they are the natural consequences of such departure ; and if we have not fallen so deeply, we

must attribute it to the restraining grace of God. In this parable the Lord permits the sinner to go as it were to the gates of hell ; and without this, the parable would be imperfect, and not a parable for all sinners, and would fail to show that man can still return to God from the greatest departures and sins. “ Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” \*

#### 6. *The Retrospect and Exhortation.*

1. When a pilgrim stands at the end of his journey, he looks back once more in spirit over the way he has travelled, and he reflects once more upon the joys experienced, the dangers escaped, and asks himself earnestly, What have I learned ?

We have come to the end of our medi-

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\* Isaiah 1 : 18.



tations on this parable. What profit and blessing have we received from them? Would that we might, upon this retrospect, experience the blessed joy of the Prodigal Son after his return to his father's house, and be able to say, We are in our Father's house, we are God's children; and at the same time feel the desire to remain in our Father's house until our end on earth. Every one who reads this parable, cannot but pity the unfortunate one. His sad fate appeals to our hearts, and awakens in us feelings of the deepest sympathy. But this is not all that our Lord wishes to accomplish by this parable. We should not regard the Prodigal Son as a stranger, but each one should regard himself as the Prodigal Son, each one should read his own history in the history of this son, each one see himself in this picture. We should see in his apostasy our own apostasy from

God, our own sins against God, and our own misery without God.

This story of the Prodigal Son may have moved us even to tears, but mere tears are not conversion. It may have aroused us to make pious resolutions, but these are not complete repentance. If we have truly turned from our sins to our God and Father, then we have also been really improved and blessed.

2. My friend, are you still a prodigal son, wandering from God, your heavenly Father? If so, then hear, God is calling you to honor and happiness. He gives you opportunity, and exhorts you to surrender yourself to Him. Hear His voice in Nature around you. It proclaims to you, There is a God. It preaches law and order. Hear God's voice within yourself. He speaks to you through reason and conscience. Hear His voice in the

doctrines of Jesus and in His works, His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father. It speaks to you throughout the whole Bible; it is brought near to your heart and feelings in the Lord's Supper.

You hear His voice when parents, teachers, friends exhort you by word and example to practise wisdom, virtue, and godliness. You hear it in every pleasure. It says, Hear and be thankful!

It calls to you loudly in suffering and in death, in order that your heart may be softened. Do not despise it. Come! Partake of the blessedness that God offers you. Become a follower of Jesus on earth, and then a happy spirit in heaven.

“Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,  
Jesus ready stands to save you,  
Full of pity, love, and power;  
He is able; He is able;  
He is willing; doubt no more.

“Come, ye weary, heavy laden,  
Lost and ruin'd by the fall;  
If ye tarry till ye're better,  
Ye will never come at all;  
Not the righteous; not the righteous;  
Sinners Jesus came to call.”

In the tender and affectionate addresses which Jesus spoke to His disciples shortly before His crucifixion, He declared that the most intimate and vital relation existed between Himself and His disciples, — a relation that no power, not even that of death, could break up.

If, therefore, this relation exists not only in time, but also extends to eternity, how many spirits in heaven must be concerned about our temporal and eternal welfare!

Perhaps a beloved departed father, or a dear mother, who have here on earth often prayed in tears *for you*, prodigal son, or *for you*, prodigal daughter, that

you might be brought to walk in the way of virtue and godliness.

Or a brother, a sister, a friend, or a beloved child, who call to you from the spirit-world, by all that is holy, to strive after your salvation, in order that you may also dwell with them in the eternal glory of heaven.

Therefore think of your pious parents, and of your happy departed children, who were so dear to you, and repent, return to God, that you may find them again in the land of blessed immortality.

“Hark! heard ye not a sound  
Sweeter than the wild-bird’s note, or minstrel’s  
lay?

I know that music well, for night and day  
I hear it echoing round.

“It is the tuneful chime  
Of spirit voices!—’tis my infant band  
Calling the mourner from this darkened land  
To joy’s unclouded clime.

“My beautiful, my blest !

I see them there,” surround the heavenly “throne ;  
With winning words, and fond beseeching tone  
They woo me to my rest.”

“What mercy, if the death of a child  
prove the life of the parent !”

3. Children, my earnest prayer for you  
is, that God may keep you from the ways  
of sin !

But if any one of you should wander  
from the right path, then hear the voice  
of love calling you to return. God gave  
His son to you ; Christ died upon the cross  
for you, that you might not be lost for  
God, for the Savior, for the Church, for  
yourself.

Doubt not. Have confidence towards  
God in Jesus Christ. Seek grace ! God  
will permit you to find Him.

Oh youth ! consider the dangers of  
youth, of frivolity, of self-will, and of  
seeking after independence ; they will



work your ruin, if you do not resist them. It is a favor of God, that sin makes men miserable. From it proceeds repentance, from repentance return, and from return salvation.

Remain faithful to God. Never depart from Him, and you will have a great advantage. He that is recovered is also happy; but he never can be as happy as you, if you remain faithful to God.

4. And if you see a man who has fallen, perhaps deep and terribly fallen, do not cast him off. Jesus received sinners; do you also receive them. Extend your hand to the fallen. Perhaps you may be able to raise him up again, to give him again to God, and to his Savior.

“If a soul thou would’st redeem,  
And lead a lost one back to God —  
Would’st thou a guardian angel seem  
To one who long in guilt has trod —

Go kindly to him — take his hand  
With gentlest words, within thine own,  
And by his side a brother stand,  
Till all the demons thou dethrone."

Has such an one injured you? Then forgive, as God forgives, and as you hope to be forgiven. Rejoice, as the angels rejoice over a sinner that repenteth. Your joy in heaven will be increased by the consciousness of having helped a soul back to God and happiness.

5. No condition is more dangerous, than that in which a man believes that he is already good enough, and says, If only all were as good as I am! Such a person does not go forward; on the other hand, this vain imagination causes him to lose the goodness which he possesses; for he looks down in pride upon others, who are, perhaps, better than he is.

How many know anything of the repentance of the Prodigal Son from their

own experience? We were once, all of us, prodigal sons and daughters, and are yet, if we have not returned to our Father.

Oh man! thou who still livest without God and Christ, be moved to return speedily with the Prodigal Son to God, your heavenly Father.

Consider, that repentance and the renewal of the Holy Ghost must be experienced by you, or death, eternal death, will follow, as the reward of your sinful life!

God has prepared in Jesus Christ everything necessary to secure the salvation of your soul; all the means of grace are freely offered and brought nigh to you.

You have the Bible, that sacred volume, which, to use the words of Locke, has "God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its contents," in which the way to heaven is pointed out to you; you have

prayer, by which you can speak with God, and lay your wants before Him ; you have the baptism of regeneration, the Lord's Supper, and the Church, as the bearer of all these means of grace, and as the hospital for your sin-sick soul.

Why do you stand without before the door, where sorrow oppresses you, where you can have no real joy, no true satisfaction ? Without, where the cares of life, the lusts of the world, and sin, hold you fast, and consume you. Go, go within, into your Father's house, into Christ's kingdom, into the covenant of believers, that you also may be one of the blessed of the Lord. Yes, let all come in, who mourn over their sins, and weep over their misery ! Fear not ! Trust in the love of God, who calls you, who draws you, who wills that you also shall be saved ! He will receive you with joy. This is the gospel of glad tidings which

is preached in His name. So soon as you renounce the world and sin, a friendly welcome will greet you from the house of the Father, and your return to God will be the way to the most blessed joys.

You will transform a wilderness into a Paradise. You will escape a curse to inherit a blessing. You will press through death to eternal life. Is there a more blessed change? Therefore, come, taste, and see, that the Lord is gracious. He receives sinners, and makes them happy for time and eternity!

God the Father stands ready to receive you as his prodigal son or his prodigal daughter!

Jesus Christ, the son of God, is ready to speak pardon and peace to your sin-stricken soul!

The spirit of God is ready to sanctify you and to seal God's holiness in you.

The preacher of your congregation is

ready, as the ambassador of Christ, again to receive you !

The wedding garment is ready, and you are heartily welcome to receive it !

The Church is ready again to receive you as a son or a daughter !

Angels are ready to proclaim the glad tidings of your repentance in heaven, and all heaven is ready to echo, "The dead is alive, the lost is found !" Amen.

THE END.











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